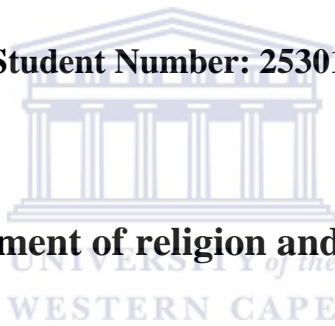


UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Thesis for MTh. Degree

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Department of religion and theology

Title of thesis

**A Theology of Possessions in the African context: A critical
survey**

Supervisor: Prof. Ernst Conradie

Date November 2007

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister
Theologiae in the Department of Religion and Theology at the Faculty of Arts
at the University of the Western Cape**

By

John Hugo Fischer

Supervisor: Professor E. M. Conradie

**UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE**

November 2007

Keywords

Possessions

Africa

Christianity

Worldviews

Consumerism

Private Property

Communal Possessions

Urbanization

Stewardship

Vineyard Missions



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Abstract

This thesis has been researched against the backdrop of conflict that had arisen due to different approaches to possessions in the African church as practiced within the Association of Vineyard Churches. This conflict arose because of different cultural approaches to possessions and property rights as they affect different parts of the African church. In order to analyse this conflict and arrive at some understanding of the different forces operating in the area of resources and possessions it was necessary to adopt the approach laid out below. The objective was to arrive at an analysis of such differences, and the sources from which such differences originated, and then to draw some conclusion with regard to the present state of the debate on possessions and how this could affect the praxis of the Vineyard churches in Sub Saharan Africa in which I serve. The history of the development of such approaches is traced from the times of the Habiru through the amphyctyony to the times of the monarchy, logging the changes in approach to possessions that developed in the people of Israel. An examination of certain New Testament scriptures follows detailing the approach of the early church to the ownership and use of possessions. From there I survey the history of patriarchal and monastic literature as it impacts on an understanding of possessions. A number of socio-economic and worldview factors are then surveyed in order to gain an understanding of the way in which they impact the African church's approach to resources and possessions. Different forms of ownership also impact upon the African church scene and these are examined in order to assess their importance. I then examine the contribution of the missionary movement to an understanding of possessions. The body of this thesis is then used to survey the different approaches of African theologians who offer solutions to the economic and cultural problems of post-colonial Africa as they impinge upon a theology of possessions. I examine a number of theologians who represent the different streams with a view to arriving at some effective way of approaching the cultural and economic problems inherent in the African church. Such theologians include those offering solutions from the inculturation, liberation, reconstruction and New Pentecostal schools of thought. In this thesis I derive the conclusion that the most effective approach to such problems lies in reconstruction theology as it is presented by Jesse Mugambi and others. This conclusion is based on the proper approach of these theologians to individualism and capitalism as found in the consumer society that has penetrated African communalism, resulting in the breakdown of traditional African culture and extended family life. The impact of the New Pentecostal churches is analysed and some conclusions offered. There is yet much room for further research to be done into the issues of modernism and postmodernism, capitalism and socialism, and the different biblical approaches to these issues. Many of the Liberal and reconstruction theologians in other parts of the third world need to be included in this debate before dogmatic claims or statements can be made. This thesis is offered as a contribution to such a debate. The conclusions arrived at reflect my own experiences as they parallel many of the findings of the reconstruction school of thought. Again, the offering regarding praxis in the African church as represented in Vineyard churches in Africa is in the context of my ongoing experience in this area.

Declaration

I declare that “A Theology of Possessions in the African Church: a Critical Survey” is my work, that it has not been submitted before to any other university, and that all resources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete reference.

John Hugo Fischer

November 2007



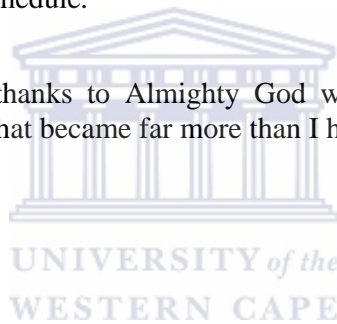
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Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without the supervision and assistance of Professor Ernst M. Conradie. His constant correcting of my bad habits in construction and my tendency to use non-academic language must have been an affliction upon him. I, in turn, found him encouraging and challenging. The Prof's demand of correct structure and format has been a constant encouragement to me to be more applied in my recording. I have appreciated his involvement and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Derek Morphew for many encouraging chats, for being able to bounce ideas off him and simply for his friendship over many years. Many thanks are also due to my staff at New Life Vineyard Christian Fellowship. They have had to carry the load of my absorption in the topic of this thesis and have been a constant source of support even though my rehearsing of the current theme must have bordered on boredom. I need to make mention of "Mackie", the librarian assigned to the theology department, as someone who was always ready to discuss issues with me as well as helping me, on many occasions, to trace books I was unable to find. Many thanks need to go to the leaders in the Namibian and Zambian Vineyard churches for being sounding boards for my work on this thesis. They have added richly to the lessons I have learned by doing this study. My sincere thanks go to my wife Ethel, who has lost many hours of my time by my devoting evenings to research and writing. She has uncomplainingly supported me in an endeavour that has added much to an already overloaded schedule.

Finally, I need to express my thanks to Almighty God who has given me the strength and perseverance to complete a task that became far more than I had at first envisioned.



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Chapter one

Methodological aspects

1.1 Introduction

This research project will entail a survey of contributions to contemporary African Christian theology on the theme of a theology of possessions. Such contributions typically grapple with the tensions between views on possessions derived from the Biblical roots of Christianity, African traditional culture and religion, the influence of Western notions of private property and the

contemporary impact of cultural forces such as globalisation, a consumerist culture and materialism. This project will offer a classification and a critical analysis of such contributions in order to establish the state of the current debate in Africa on a theology of possessions that would be adequate for ecclesial ministry in the African context.

1.2 Context and relevance

1.2.1. The context within which this research project is situated is that of the missions of the Association of Vineyard Churches in Zambia and Namibia. The Vineyard churches began in 1978 when John Wimber formed an association of five churches in the Los Angeles area. This originally American association became widely spread so that there are now nine autonomous Associations in different countries. The Associations comprise some 1500 local congregations working in 58 countries, the majority of which are in the so-called Third World. Vineyard Churches are operative in several countries in Africa as well as in South America, Asia Minor and Asia and in countries facing similar problems such as India, China, Russia (Siberia) and Indonesia. Because of problems encountered in working in these Third World countries, an International Missions Task Force was formed seven years ago. As a member of the National Board of the Association of Vineyard Churches in South Africa I have also been tasked with the training of church leaders and the administration of finances that have been donated by churches in America and the United Kingdom that are used by Vineyard Churches in Zambia and Namibia

As a member of this task force it is my responsibility to examine the issues relating to money and resources with a view to providing a resource for guidance in cross-cultural settings. It is in the context of this task that I have undertaken this research, presuming that much of African culture will have parallels in other third world countries.

Within this ministry in an African context, I have experienced several instances where conflicting assumptions, perceptions and attitudes related to the appropriation of allocated funds and the use of vehicles, equipment and facilities have emerged. The following examples may be mentioned in this regard:

- One of the Namibian churches had accumulated R18000 in their building fund. This money was not immediately needed because the building program had not yet begun. On visiting the church I discovered that people on the building fund committee had borrowed R16000 of the money as they had pressing needs. This was regarded as an acceptable practice amongst the members of this committee, even though the funds were not used for the appropriate purpose.

- The Association of Vineyard Churches in South Africa has endeavoured to set up our new pastors with small businesses in order to help them to be self-supporting. One such young man, fresh from Bible school, had been given R5000 worth of new clothing to sell in order to support himself. He was supposed to keep half of the money thus generated in order to buy more clothing. When he enquired about more clothing, he was asked whether he had the money to pay for it. He informed us (AVC South Africa) that his relatives had arrived and that he had been obliged to look after them and therefore had no money left for the purchase of more clothing. As Westerners we found this unacceptable.
- Another student had been given a sum of money to set himself up in a small business raising chickens. Instead, he used the money towards his air ticket to take up a bursary offered to him in England. The leaders in Zambia seemed to have approved of this arrangement.
- An issue that arose recently illustrates this difference of understanding. One of the pastors in Zambia was sent \$6000 to purchase a vehicle for use in the work. The money appears to have been used for something other than that which it was allocated to, as it was no longer available for the purchase of the vehicle. There appeared to be some reluctance among the leaders to make an issue out of this.

In reflecting on such experiences, I have increasingly come to the realisation that my understanding of possessions differed significantly from that of the church leaders involved in such ongoing differences of opinion. It seems clear to me that such differences of opinion have to be understood in the light of the pervasive influence of competing worldviews that continue to shape the views on possessions in African churches. Typically, African church leaders have to grapple with the tensions between views on possessions derived from the Biblical roots of Christianity, African traditional culture and religion, the influence of Western notions of private property and the contemporary impact of cultural forces such as globalisation, a consumerist culture, materialism (see Nürnberger 1998, Williams 1998) and the urbanisation of African churches (see Bate 2002, Fortman and Goldewijk 2005, Luam 2002, Rudman 1991, Speckman 2001). This research project may be understood as an attempt to gain clarity on the nature of such different understandings of possessions.

1.2.2. Relevance. It is important to gain some provisional clarity on the rather diffuse notion of “possessions”. For the purposes of this research project the notion of “possessions” will refer primarily to the ownership and stewardship of resources by local churches, in particular by Vineyard Churches and their officials. Such resources would include the following: 1) funds

donated to the Vineyard Churches in Zambia and Namibia by external donors and budgets allocated for specific projects, 2) church premises (church buildings, offices, manses) whether owned by Vineyard churches or by church officials, 3) equipment such as vehicles, audiovisual aids and computers owned by the church or church officials. This notion of possessions excludes land owned by the church to be used for various purposes. It also excludes land or property owned by lay members of the church.

Since this notion of possessions includes the connotations of both ownership and stewardship, it should be noted that different views could emerge on issues relating to the very meaning of ownership and on issues relating to the judicious use, administration and management of that which is owned.

1.2.3. A long legacy of reflection on a *theology* of possessions exists within the context of Christian theology. The classic contributions of scholars such as St Benedict, St Basil the Great, St Francis of Assisi, Luther, Calvin and John Wesley may be mentioned in this regard.

In the twentieth century a sizeable corpus of literature emerged on a theology of possessions. Such contributions focus on a variety of related themes such as biblical perspectives relating to possessions,¹ a theology of land (see Brueggemann 1977, Van der Walt 2003), the frugal stewardship of natural resources (see Blomberg 1999, Hall 1990, Schaeffer 1969, Schweiker & Mathewes 2004), the management of church and personal finances (see Annual Conference Statement 1985, Eller 1973, Henry 1971, Nürnberger 1998), the just distribution of financial resources in the context of poverty and contending ideologies that influence our understanding of ownership (see Hill 2000, Koopman 2005, Luam 2002, Maranz 2000, Nürnberger 1985, Van der Walt 2003).

In the light of such contributions related to the theme of a theology of possessions, it is important to restrict the scope of this study to the ownership and stewardship of resources by churches and their officials. More specifically, the scope of this research project will be restricted to contributions on a theology of possessions that have emerged within the context of contemporary African Christian theologies. This calls for some further clarification on the delimitation of this study.

1.3. Delimitation and statement of the research problem

¹ There is a sizable corpus of literature on concepts relating to possessions within the biblical texts. In this thesis I confine myself to simply alluding to such contributions and will therefore not attempt to offer an in depth examination of this corpus of literature.

a) This research will seek to make a contribution to the field of African theology – which is one of many contemporary forms of indigenous theology. African theology has emerged since the 1960's in the wake of the process of decolonisation on the African continent. In this context the “All Africa Conference of Churches” in 1965 may be seen as the beginning of African Theology. A distinction may be made between earlier expressions of incipient and mainly oral forms of theology and the emergence of a corpus of theological publications that are written by African authors for African readers on themes that are pertinent to Christianity in Africa and reflect the daily experiences of African Christians. Increasingly, these authors are having their works published by publishers on the African continent.

Any review of African theology will have to take into consideration the different geographical regions in which theological works are published (West-Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa), the distinction between Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and indigenous (AIC) theologies in Africa, and the contributions by senior scholars such as John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (in East Africa), Kwesi Dickson, PK Sarpong, John Pobee, Kwame Bediako, Jean-Marc Ela (in West Africa), and Siqibo Dwane, Tinyiko Maluleke, Gabriel Setiloane, and Buti Thlagale (in South Africa). In addition, the contributions by a large number of liberation theologians and black theologians in the Southern African context have to be taken into account in this regard (including Allan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Thlagale). African women's theology has gained increasing prominence over the last decade or two, especially due the work of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians under the leadership of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, widely regarded as the mother of African women theologians.

Several critical overviews of African theology have recently been published which have assessed the state of the debate in African theology (see the contributions by Bosch 1974, Bediako 1997, Bujo 2003, Maluleke 1997, Meyer 2004, Mugambi 1998). In such overviews it has become customary to distinguish between different models of, or approaches to, African theology. Although different classifications are possible in this regard, the following schools of thought may be listed here: Roman Catholic inculturation theology (see Magesa 2004, Skhakhane 2000), contributions that focus on “translating” the gospel into an African idiom (see Kiros 2001, Mbiti 1980, Mugambi 1998), African liberation theologies (see Boesak 1979, Maimela 1992), African reconstruction theologies (see Mugambi 1998, Van der Walt 2003, Villa-Vicencio 1992), African women's theologies (see Amadiume 2000, Mary Getui, Kretzchmar 1995, Mercy Oduyoye), evangelical theologies (see Kato 1975, 1976), Pentecostal theologies (see Meyer 2004, Anderson 1992, 2000) and the theological reflections emerging from within the context of African

Indigenous Churches (AIC's) (see Ford 1996, Magesa 1997, Mbiti 1975).

In this thesis I also reflect on especially two categories operating in the above sources, namely adaptation and inculturation (Kigongo 2005, Komakoma 2003, Magesa 2004, Mbiti 1980, Sakuba 2004). Contributions to African Christian theology cover the full spectrum of traditional theological themes and sub-disciplines. In addition to such traditional themes, a number of cultural concerns around ancestor veneration, polygamy, libation, witchcraft, initiation and exorcism, communalism and life forces, views on death, suffering, sickness and healing and spiritual intermediaries are also addressed in the context of African theologies.² Given the many societal challenges on the African continent, it is not surprising that political and economic issues are very prominent in such contributions. This research project is situated within the context of discourse in African theology on economic concerns.

b) Contributions in African theology on economic concerns typically focus on a number of ethical issues, for example the legacy of colonialism and slavery (Magesa 1997, Van der Walt 2003), capitalism and African socialism (Nkruma 1967, Alston 2003), the many faces of poverty (Fortman and Goldewijk 2005, Nürnberger 1998), including the role played by gender, the environment, economic injustices, the ambiguities around development projects, financial dependency with specific reference to the burden which international debt places on African countries (Speckman 2001), structural adjustment programmes, unemployment, trade restrictions and so forth (Van der Walt 2003).

Another aspect of theological reflection on economic concerns relates to issues around the ownership and use of land (Vilakazi 1998), material resources (Blomberg 1999), economic means of production, infrastructure and financial resources (Komakoma 2003, Koopman 2005). Theological reflections on such issues emerge within a personal and family context, communal life, ecclesial ministries, and more indirectly also at a macro-economic level (Komakoma 2003).

c) This thesis seeks to make a contribution to theological reflection in Africa on the ownership and stewardship of resources within the context of ecclesial ministries. It offers a classification and a critical analysis of contributions on a theology of possessions in the context of African theology. On this basis, the research problem that is investigated in this thesis may be formulated in the following way:

² For references to contributions on these themes, see the indexed bibliography by Conradie & Fredericks (2004:183-186).

How should the state of the debate on a theology of possessions within the context of contemporary African theology be assessed?

d) The formulation of the research problem calls for some further clarification on the following aspects:

- This thesis is focussed on the existing corpus of literature written within the context of African Christianity and published in English or English translations on a “theology of possessions” as circumscribed above (see the literature survey above). It should be noted that a theology of possessions would not necessarily be the main theme of such publications. Often books and articles in the field of African theology discuss matters around a theology of possessions only in an ancillary manner.
- This thesis does not focus on any of the theological schools in contemporary African theology in particular; it takes publications from East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa into account. Publications from Roman Catholic (see Magesa 1997, 1998, 2004), Protestant / Evangelical (see Blomberg 1999, Eller 1973, Meyer 2004, Van der Walt 2003) and Pentecostal theology (see Anderson 2000, Clark 2001) are taken into consideration. Literature produced within the context of Coptic and Ethiopian Churches and on African Traditional Religion (see Mbiti 1975, 1980; Mtetwa 1978, Van der Walt 2003) does not form an integral part of the research project.
- The focus of this thesis is on literature published in the post-colonial period in Africa. Most of the contributions on a theology of possessions in the context of African theology have been published since the 1970’s.
- The thesis primarily examines publications by African theologians writing for African readers and which are published on the African continent. In addition, contributions published outside the African context but with a view to readers in African churches are also considered. Publications by South African authors of mainly European descent are taken into consideration where there is a clear intention to reflect on the African context.

The major task of this research project is to offer a survey of such contributions by identifying and classifying the existing contributions in African theology on a theology of possessions. On this basis an analysis of the state of the debate in this regard is offered.

In assessing the state of the debate, I pay attention to the ways in which African theologies relate African and Western worldviews (see Balcomb 2005, Bate 2002, Magesa 1997, Maranz 2000, Skhakhane 2000) and assumptions on possessions to one another. In addition, the adequacy of

such contributions for ecclesial praxis in the African church is also considered. In assessing the discourse, questions such as the following have been kept in mind as well: To what extent has urbanisation influenced the view on possessions held by the African church in urban areas? To what extent has African theology absorbed consumerist and materialist views? How has this had an affect on notions of the stewardship of possessions? Are there significant differences in terms of the use and stewardship of possessions in predominantly white African churches and black African churches?

It should be noted that there are many themes in African theology that are ancillary to this research topic such as the issue of land, modernity and post-modernity, different worldviews; the relationship between traditional African culture and the gospel and others. In this research I do not examine these themes except insofar as they contribute to a theology of possessions.

1.4. The argument of the thesis

In this thesis I show that the following approaches to a theology of possessions may be identified in literature on African Christian theology:

Some theologians tend to assume Western concepts of private property, the accumulation of capital and the private possession of the means of production in an understanding of the ownership and stewardship of resources in ecclesial praxis. One may expect theologians from Evangelical and Pentecostal persuasions to follow this trend (see Hastings 1994, Idowu 1973, Isichei 1995, Nyirongo 1997, Mtetwa 1978, Skhakhane 2000).

Other theologians would tend to emphasise the need for a re-application of African traditional notions of communal ownership of land and economic means of production in the stewardship of church property and resources. Here one may presume that theologians who call for inculturation (Appiah 2001, Magesa 2004, Sarpong 1982, Shorter) and indigenisation (Pobee 1979, Setiloane 1986) would follow this trend.

African contributions to liberation theology and African women's theology tend to be critical of the unequal distribution of resources and call for a redistribution of resources and possessions from the rich to the poor. Among these theologians would be Jean Marc Ela, Alan Boesak, Buti Thlagale, Basil Moore, Bengt Kato. It is only possible for local churches to engage in their stewardship responsibilities in a context where the micro-economic economic inequalities resulting from colonialism have been properly addressed. This implies that local churches should contribute to calls for such changes.

A further group of theologians are concerned with “reconstruction” and the need for acceptance of responsibility for the right use of resources. These theologians are concerned with the fight against corruption and the need for all to exercise frugality. They do not call for communal life but for proper use of creation. Among these theologians would be Jesse Mugambi, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Benezet Bujo, M.F. Shilongonyane.

Another group of theologians from within the Pentecostal sector of the African church tend to offer a religious legitimation for the “upward social mobility” amongst the poor. Here deliverance is regarded as the first step to obtaining material wealth, mainly in the shape of possessions, with this prosperity being seen as a sign of God’s blessing on the person. Authors such as Birgit Meyer, Allan Anderson, Mathew Clark, JD Amanor and Bengt Sundkler have offered critical reflections on this tendency.

In response to those theologies that promote a retrieval of traditional African culture, there are others who emphasise the need for churches to function within an increasingly urbanised context. Within such a context, there is often a need to allow Western notions of private property and traditional African notions of communal property to be held side-by-side and to seek to manage conflicting interests wherever they surface in this regard (see Bate 2002, Kigongo 2005).

There are yet other theologies which, while accepting the processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and globalisation as more or less inevitable, resist a romanticised retrieval of traditional African culture, but also offer a critique of the pervasive and corrosive impact of ideologies such as capitalism, consumerism and hedonism in society as well as in faith communities (see Balcomb 1996, 2005, Bediako 1996, Mbiti 1980).

1.5. Research procedure

The main task of this thesis is to offer a survey of the discourse on a theology of possessions within the context of African Christian theology. The following steps have been followed in this regard:

In chapter 2 I offer a brief history of a Christian theology of possessions.

In chapter 3 I deal with those historical factors that have influenced a theology of possessions.

In chapter 4 I deal with the impact made by missionaries on a theology of possessions.

In chapter 5 I examine the impact of inculturation on a theology of possessions.

In chapter 6 I examine the contribution of African Liberation theology to a theology of possessions.

In chapter 7 I examine the contribution of Reconstruction theology to a theology of possessions.

In chapter 8 I examine the contribution of the New Pentecostal churches to a theology of possessions.

In chapter 9 I draw some conclusions on the state of the debate in developing a theology of possessions.

In chapter 10 I attempt to apply the conclusions reached in this thesis to the praxis of the Vineyard churches in Africa as regards the ownership and stewardship of possessions.

In order to address this task, it is necessary to gain some background on the history of a theology of possessions in the Christian tradition, with reference to contributions from the early church, the monastic tradition, the medieval period, the renaissance and reformation, the legacy of modernity and the twentieth century ecumenical movement. Such an overview, drawing on a number of secondary publications in this regard (see Brown 1976, Cramer 1966, Cross 1958, Jackson 2005, Kelly 1968, Moorman 1982, Southern 1968, Taylor 1975, Tredget 2005), is provided in chapter 2 of the thesis.

In addition, it is also important to understand the influence of a number of external factors on African theologies of possession. These factors include differing worldviews, economic systems and understandings of property. In particular, it will be important to describe the philosophical assumptions behind Western notions of private property (see Anderson 1968, Catherwood 1969, Conference Statement 1985, Guest 2004) and the traditional African worldview underpinning communal notions of property (Komakoma 2003, Maranz 2000, Mbiti 1973). A discussion of these factors is offered in chapter 3 of the thesis.

On this basis, the major task of this thesis is to analyse, classify and assess discourse on a theology of possessions through a literature survey of contributions to an indigenous African theology on this theme. In the process the similarities and differences in the seven groups outlined above have been clarified.

Although the task of this research project would be completed on the basis of such an analysis of discourse on a theology of possessions in African theology, it would also be appropriate to offer some concluding remarks on the implications of such an analysis for ecclesial ministries in the African context, with specific reference to those of the Association of Vineyard Churches. Such

concluding comments are offered in the final chapter.



A Christian Theology of Possessions: A Brief History

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will offer some historical background to a theology of possessions by examining the Biblical roots and subsequent history in the Christian tradition of such a theology of possessions. The discussion will first cover a theology of possessions in the Old and New Testaments and the Patristic period. This will be followed by an examination of some contributors in the mediaeval period, the Renaissance and the Protestant reformation, ending with an examination of the rise of modernity, capitalism and the emergence of consumerism. The contribution of the Ecumenical movement and the World Council of Churches will complete this chapter on an introductory history of a theology of possessions.

In this chapter I do not endeavour to present an exhaustive examination of the period but seek to offer a very brief history of the development of a theology of possessions through the periods

referred to above. The strategy that I follow is to take snapshots, as it were, of crucial contributions to a theology of possessions. I then attempt to categorise the commonalities and discrepancies that derive from this cursory analyses. The selection of these limited texts is totally arbitrary and necessary because of space as well as their not forming the main thrust of this thesis. In this way one may plot the changes in a theology of possessions as they occurred.

2.2. The Old Testament roots of a theology of possessions

There are two avenues that will be pursued in this section, namely selected passages referring to possessions and the etymology of key biblical concepts:

I confine myself to three Old Testament passages that reflect different ages in the history of Israel and that indicate a change in the understanding of possessions in the life of ancient Israel, namely Leviticus 25:23-28, Psalm 50:10-12, Amos 2:6-8.

Leviticus 25:23-28

There are two views on the dating of Leviticus, one of which places the dating of the book as contemporary with Moses' time (see Wenham, Harrison, Keil and Delitzsch, Kunning) and one which dates it as synonymous with the collapse of Israel in the time of the Assyrian invasion (see Bright, Gottwald, Vriezen, von Rad). A further view would be represented by Noordtzij which recognises the basic Mosaic dating of Leviticus while allowing the existence of various materials in the book which date to a time much later than Moses (Noordtzij 1982:vii). Depending on which view is taken (either early or late) one's conclusions will differ. Although some scholars accept the placing of this passage in the priestly source, it nevertheless looks back to a time of nomadic theocracy in the history of Israel. I will accept the dating as early rather than late and consequently place this passage as the first of the three to be examined. I understand the ramifications of this choice but have taken such a choice as the divergence of opinion on the dating of the Pentateuch allows me to make such a choice. As it does not really affect the application of the text to this subject I suggest that the debate over dating is not crucial in this instance (Tidball 1996:20) (see Schluter and Ashcroft 2005 for discussion on the Jubilee).

Eichrodt (1964:233-256) traces the development of the individual in relation to the nation from the nomadic times to the monarchical period. It is possible to observe a change in the understanding of possessions as the individual's relationship to the tribe or clan changes. This fits in with the progression of an understanding of possessions reflected in this passage and the two following. This passage refers to the Jubilee and embraces the underlying theological principle that the land must not be sold permanently, for:

The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants (Leviticus 25:23). This is in line with the Pentateuch teaching that it is God who gave the land to Israel. (Genesis 15:7, 17:8, 24:7, Exodus 6:4, Leviticus 20:24, 25:2);(Annual Conference Statement 1985:4). The people were simply tenants (Noordzij 1984:256). The allotment given to the tribes and families could not be permanently lost. The jubilee aimed at bringing everything back to its original structure and at preventing the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth. The immediate concern of the law of Jubilee was with the redemption of land and property (Wenham 1979:320). Possessions that had been pawned or sold had to be restored to the original owner. It is significant that, with the advent of the monarchy and the change in attitude towards possessions (see Psalm 50:10-12 below), there is no evidence of the Jubilee ever being kept. There is, however, literature pointing out the ongoing significance of the Jubilee as a principle given by God to his people (see Schluter and Ashcroft 2005:166-168, 195-196).

The word used here for possessions, *achuzzah*, refers particularly to land, however, the concept of the jubilee applied to anything that was lost, including freedom (see Baker 1994:2300 for a complete analysis of the word).

Psalm 50:10-12

This psalm falls within the second Book of Psalms and is dated by Harrison within the time of the monarchy (1969:984). Bright (1967:131) compares some of the psalms with the Canaanite literature of Ras Shamra, placing them in the earliest period of Israel's history. Gottwald also places this psalm in the collection of David's psalms (1959:505). Williams (1986:19) ascribes Psalm 50 to Asaph, the Levite musician. While the arguments on dating are varied, it is important, for the purpose of a theology of possessions, to note that the society had changed from the time of the amphictyony to the time of the monarchy. The monarchic period, with a few exceptions, was marked by formalism and this psalm speaks to that context (see Isaiah 1:10-17, as well as the ministry of Elijah and Jeremiah). There is an attack made on the 'formalists' in this psalm for presuming to think that God needed them to give him anything. The writer lists all things as belonging to the Lord and declares God's lack of needing the formalists to produce anything for him. Williams sees this Psalm as being prophetic in that it exposes Israel's sins. In it God, through the Psalmist, judges their worship (vv.7-15) and their obedience (vv.16-21, Williams 1986:355). The significance of this passage in relation to the notion of possessions is the claim that all possessions belonged to God in the first place. At this time there was a shift from stewardship to ownership with a far more individualistic approach to possessions. The word used for 'mine', *immad*, has the meaning, "from me". Once again the significance for this thesis

is the declaration of God's ownership of everything (see Ellison 1968:45).

Amos 2:6-8

The book of Amos is dated to Jeroboam's reign (Andersen & Freedman 1984, Gottwald 1959:266, Harrison 1969:884). During this reign there was a growing inequality between the wealthy and the poor. Abuses of wealth without social conscience, to which oriental countries seem to have been particularly prone, were a terrible price to pay for Israel's status as a nation (Gottwald 1959:267).

The lower classes slipped more and more into debt and eventually became tenant farmers (Gottwald 1959:167, Motyer 1974:61-63). In the book of Amos the prophet condemns the shameless exploitation of the poor and is clear that judgment is the consequence of such exploitation (Motyer 1974:15). The portion of the book we are concerned with deals specifically with the wrongdoing of Israel. The common denominator in these verses is the abuse of power by God's people (Hubbard 1991:142). The first two chapters of Amos are dedicated to declaring God's judgment on various nations for acts of inhumanity to other nations, with the subsequent chapters dealing specifically with Israel and Judah. This condemnation of the excesses of the nations, including Israel, expresses social goals that are in sharp contrast to the economic and social thinking of the ancient near East (see Eichrodt 1964: 333).

The sin of Israel was that of lording it over the poor and helpless in spite of knowing God's concern for the very ones they were mistreating. The word used for the poor in these verses is *dal* (Strong's undated: 30) that has the meaning of weak, thin, needy or poor.

The implication of these passages and, by association, the rest of the Old Testament is that possessions are to be held in trust as resources that ultimately belong to God. The observation may be made that there was a decline in the understanding of possessions being held in trust at the same time as there was a movement away from theocracy to monarchy which resulted in the development of a wealthy class who were inclined to exploit the poor resulting in prophetic condemnation of the abuses of wealth.

2.3. The New Testament roots of a theology of possessions

There are many New Testament passages that would be relevant to a theology of possessions. I restrict myself here to a discussion of three such passages. The choice of these passages is rather arbitrary but is based upon their reflecting the teaching of three different New Testament sources on the subject of the stewardship of resources.

Matthew 6:19-33

This passage falls within the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus lays down principles for living in the Kingdom and deals with a multitude of diverse situations. The passage under consideration deals with possessions and the resources needed for living.

According to Filson (1971:10-15) the date of Matthew's Gospel is difficult to derive. He arrives at a date not earlier than 70 CE and perhaps even as late as the 80's or 90's. Keener (1993:44) dates it more or less in the 70's. Jones concurs with this dating (1994:xxi). The Gospel was written to Jewish readers (probably originally to listeners as the pre-existence of an oral tradition is strongly argued by most scholars, see Stonehouse 1963:114, Guthrie 1965:117-122). This is significant in that they would have had understanding of the Old Testament teachings on possessions. The place of writing was probably in Syria, perhaps Antioch, or in Phoenicia (Filson 1971:15).

Thielicke begins his comment on this passage by heading it "Overcoming anxiety" (1963:122). In the passage there is opposition to the tendency to lay up treasure on earth (v.19) and the call to seek God's kingdom, leaving the problem of supply to him (v.33). God owns everything, feeds the birds of the air, clothes the grass of the field and is therefore able to supply the needs of believers. The emphasis here is on developing dependency and trust for daily supply and not being focussed on the need to accumulate possessions.

Bonhoeffer labels this passage "the simplicity of the carefree life. His comment puts things in a nutshell: Worldly possessions tend to turn the hearts of the disciples away from Jesus (Bonhoeffer 1959:154).

A further telling comment by Bonhoeffer sheds light on this passage, especially in relation to a theology of possessions. His understanding requires an open approach to any goods and possessions that God may make available to the individual. Earthly goods are given to be used and not to be collected (Bonhoeffer 1959:155).

He is quite scathing in his attack upon anxiety. My assessment of Bonhoeffer's approach is that he emphasises that security should be found in God alone and not in material things.

When we seek for security in possessions we are trying to drive out care with care, and the net result is the precise opposite of our anticipations (Bonhoeffer: 1959:158).

The consensus of the above comments is that possessions are not to be the focus of our existence and we may therefore conclude that the teaching of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount demands a focus on the things of God rather than holding on to possessions for security.

Acts 2:44-45

This text focuses on the early church's experiment in communality. Many scholars understand this occasion as a temporary measure, not to be applied to the church through the ages. Others understand this passage as presenting principles that are applicable to the church in any age.

Guthrie (1965:307-315) puts forward a lengthy argument examining the various positions regarding the dating of the book of Acts and then concludes for a first century dating. This would mean that the dating of Acts and Matthew places them almost in the same time frame in the early church. However, an examination of the Acts passage is helpful in determining the early church's attitude to possessions. It is far less credible to regard the book as the product of a writer's historical imagination than it is to regard it as the record of one who was in close proximity to the events he relates, which would be the case with a first-century dating (Guthrie 1965:315). Blaiklok (1964:60) speaks of it as a kind of communism of goods that did not spread. Ford (1978:34) comments: "This definitely is not communism. The government did not take it away from them. They were not slaves of the state".

This text is applicable to a theology of possessions in that it implies that the motivation of the early church was to share possessions. Barclay (1976:30) refers to the church in this passage as a sharing church bearing responsibility for each other. Marshall (1980:84) describes the situation in the early church as reflecting practices common to the Qumran group of Essenes. This passage also reflects Jesus' teachings on self-renunciation. However, from the accounts in Acts 4:32 – 5:11 it would seem that the selling of goods in order to pool them was a voluntary action. The special mention made of Barnabas regarding his selling a field appears to reflect this being an uncommon practice. A more applicable explanation would be that each person held his goods at the disposal of others whenever the need arose (Marshall 1980:84).

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

This letter was written in Macedonia and may be dated to 57 AD. This would place it earlier than the previous two passages. The passage speaks of a sharing of resources that should result in equality. While there is some dispute over the interpretation of these verses (see Barrett 1973:226) it may nevertheless be argued that Paul saw the necessity for sharing with those in need. The needs of the poor are to be met out of the abundance of others (Furnish 1984:419). Hughes concurs with this interpretation advocating reciprocity.

Under present circumstance the Corinthian Christians were enjoying a degree of material prosperity that was denied to their brethren in Jerusalem, and so the comparative abundance of

the former must be extended in brotherly generosity to meet the needs of the latter (Hughes 1962:306).

As in the Old Testament passages these New Testament passages have an emphasis on the stewardship of resources in order for the community of faith to benefit. This passage does not advocate a communality of possessions but rather a willingness to practice Christian charity towards those who are in need. Furthermore, this whole passage (vv.1-14) deals with the need for generosity within the wider context of the call to give liberally (2 Corinthians 8 & 9).

A number of Greek words are used for possessions with an extended examination and explanation of such words being offered in Brown (1976:829-853). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to enter into an examination of the meanings of these various words, however, it suffices to note that the notion of 'stewardship' is present within most of them. All we have has been given to us in trust. This recognition requires conscious, thoughtful and purposeful decision making about the use of everything (Annual Conference Statement 1985:2&3).

To sum up, these passages seem to belong in the same period making it difficult to follow a progression in understanding of a theology of possessions. However, a common thread may be followed through them as far as an understanding of possessions is concerned. This would be an acknowledgment of the need to hold possessions in stewardship, an acknowledgment of God's ability to provide and a willingness to be generous, thus reflecting Galatians 6:10:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (NIV).

2.4. The Patristic period

The patristic period stretches from the end of the 1st century to the end of the 8th century. In this thesis I will not attempt to cover this vast period in any depth except to examine four of the Church Fathers and make some comment on their contribution to a theology of possessions.

Clement of Rome (c. 96 AD) is thought to have been the third bishop after St. Peter (see Cross 1958:296). In the following quotation he expresses his understanding of the ethical responsibility of the wealthy towards the poor:

Let the strong take care of the weak; let the weak respect the strong. Let the rich man minister to the poor man; let the poor man give thanks to God that he gave him one through whom his need might be satisfied. Let the wise man manifest his wisdom not in words but in good deeds (Ferguson 1987:208).

This instruction appears to have been followed by the primitive church as is born out by the following quote:

By the time of (the emperor 361-363) Julian charitable institutions had become a characteristic and most important feature of the Christian system (Foakes Jackson 1962:581).

Aristeides (c. 150), a Christian philosopher and apologist whose apology was discovered in 1890 in a Syriac translation (Witham 1963:76) states:

They (the Christians) despise not the widow and grieve not the orphan. He that hath distributes liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as it were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren (Stevenson 1966: 57).

This quote is from an apology he is supposed to have presented to the emperor to show the charitable nature of the Christian community. It appears that the early church prided itself on the caring and mutual support it exhibited in a basically cruel and uncaring society.

Cyprian (c.250), Bishop of Carthage who lived under the Decian persecution (Cross 1958:363) in an article in the New Eusebius titled “*On the worldliness of Christians*” stated,

Individuals were applying themselves to the increase of wealth; and forgetting both what was the conduct of believers under the Apostles, and what ought to be their conduct in every age, they, with insatiable eagerness for gain devoted themselves to the multiplying of possessions and tried to amass large sums of money, while they had brethren starving within the church (Stevenson 1966:229).

The obvious censure in the above passage speaks volumes as to Cyprian’s attitude toward the growing societal tendency to accumulate possessions.

The above three examples from the Patristic period bear witness to an understanding of possessions which reflected the practice of the church of their day in exercising a communality of possessions. This understanding may be said to extend beyond the scope of the church and embraced the outsider as well.³

A further example may be added to the above.

St. Basil the Great. The contribution made by Basil is in the form of the “Rule of St. Basil”. The relevant part is:

Asceticism is a means to the perfect service of God, “Poverty and chastity”, and the monks were enjoined to care for the poor (Cross 1958:139).

The ‘rule’ is extensive and beyond the scope of this chapter for comment, hence the brief mention of some phrases.

³ For further examples of patristic statements concerning possessions see Ferguson: Lucien of Samosota (207), Irenaeus (209), Ignatius (208).

2.5. The Middle Ages

This period used to be understood to extend from the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 but more recent writers place it from c. 1100 down to the end of the 15th century (Cross 1958:899). Cross states that while it was once viewed as a sterile period, the middle Ages has come to be regarded as one of the most creative and fruitful periods in the world's history (Cross 1958:899). As Benedict of Nursia is formative to the monastic understanding of possessions, I include an examination of his teachings as he touches upon a theology of possessions. This section of the chapter offers a brief examination of the teachings of Benedict of Nursia, Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, and I then comment on the contribution of the monastic orders to a theology of possessions.

Benedict of Nursia (480-550) is known as the father of Western monasticism (Cross 1958:152). The rule of St. Benedict, section 33, gives the following directive:

More than anything else is this vice of property to be cut off root and branch from the monastery. All things shall be common to all, as it is written, 'Let not any man presume or call anything his own' (Acts 4:32) (Bettenson 1967:120).

The Benedictine order laid a foundation for the vow of poverty taken by the monks at later stages in the history of monasticism.

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) was born of noble parents and entered monastic life in the monastery of Citeaux in 1113 (Cross 1958:160) from where he established a house at Clairvaux that later became one of the chief centres of the Cistercian order. Bernard insisted that a life of self-denial and worship should be the rule of church and state, monk and layman alike (See Cross 1958:160). The rule followed by the Cistercian monks was more focussed on the inner person than on outer practices. The basic Benedictine rule of poverty and simplicity was, however, practiced by these monks (Southern 1968:212-219).

Francis of Assisi lived from 1182-1226 and was the son of a rich cloth merchant (Cross 1958:520). Francis, after a period of illness and introspection decided to devote himself to prayer and the service of the poor (Cross 1958:520).

This is the rule and way of life of the brothers minor; to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, without personal possessions, and in chastity (Bettenson 1967:128)

The ministers shall tell them to go and sell all that they have and carefully give it to the poor (Bettenson 1967:129).

Francis and his followers brought the fruits of Anselm and Bernard's teachings to the market

place and caused them to become the property of the common people (See Southern 1968:229). There is much more in this vein and it may be accessed in the “Rule of St. Francis” as found in Bettenson 1967:128-132.

From the above it may be seen that the mediaeval period produced a similar approach to individual possessions as had prevailed in the monasteries in previous times, although the monasteries accumulated vast wealth through patronage and endowment (Southern 1968:150-154). One may conclude that even though the monasteries did become the depositories of great wealth, the monks operated under strict vows regarding possessions and their use. In this way the monasteries made a large contribution to the proper stewardship of resources. The understanding of a communality of possessions was still the way in which resources and finances were held in the monasteries.

2.6. The Renaissance and Reformation period

The Renaissance was a rebirth of secular learning and a quest for knowledge that began in the 14th century (see Brown 1969:37). From then on the 16th to the 18th centuries are clearly the cradle of modern thought with the Renaissance climaxing in the enlightenment and humanistic rationalism (Coulson 1976:557). It was in this climate that Luther and then Calvin lived and taught and that the Protestant theology of the time was formed, partly through their teachings and partly through the modern secular outlook of the rational enlightened philosophies of the 17th and 18th centuries (see Brown 1969:37). In this period a significant shift occurred in man’s relationship to nature resulting in a de-sacralising of nature. A shift had begun with the Renaissance in the middle of the 14th century reflecting an interest in the world in general and man in particular and not as proof of the existence of God. Because it was thought there was no longer a need for natural theology, the created order could now be appreciated for its own sake as the creation of God (Brown 1969:39).

In this section I examine Martin Luther and John Calvin. Quite obviously it has not been possible to engage in an in depth examination of the teachings of these two fathers of the Reformation. What I have attempted is an analysis of the contribution they have made to the rise of capitalism through the development of the Protestant work ethic and comment on their contribution to a theology of possessions.

At the time of the Reformation there was a change in the understanding of possessions. Sedgwick (1999:154-168) presents the arguments of Sombart (*Der Moderne Kapitalismus* 1902) and Weber (*The Sociology of Religion* 1965) regarding the development of the work ethic. He shows that a

change developed:

From the right to earning a modest profit to the accumulation of wealth being a proof of election by identifying the fruits of faith in daily life (Sedgwick 1999:155).

Weber is portrayed by Sedgwick as arguing from the Reformation rejection of ethical dualism. This occurred through the way the Reformers placed the Christian life in the world and not as something allocated to religious actions (1999:155). Up to this time life had been segregated into the secular and the sacred. Ethical dualism was evidenced in the separation of spiritual life from everyday life resulting in a dualistic approach to life. The result of this rejection of ethical dualism was to bring all of life under the authority of God. Out of this came the development of the classic Calvinistic argument that good works did not earn salvation but demonstrated it, clinching the assurance of salvation.

Intense worldly activity, which was living the godly life, could produce that assurance (Sedgwick 1999:155).

Luther, in his “Treatise on Good Works” 1520 (Sage Digital Library), comments regarding the duties of the civil magistrate:

(They) must also suffer reforms to be enacted in their particular spheres; especially are they called to do away with the rude gluttony and drunkenness, luxury in clothing. When the heart trusts in the divine favour, it cannot seek after the temporal goods of others, nor cleave to money, but according to the seventh commandment, will use it with cheerful liberality for the benefit of the neighbour.

Once again there is the call to caring for others out of one’s own possessions. Luther observed the growing accumulation of wealth and the concomitant loose behaviour and greed that accompanied it as being open to condemnation.

Calvin, in commenting on the parable of the labourers in the Vineyard, makes this point explicitly:

Man was created for activity. Each has his or her divinely appointed station. Our whole life is useless, and we are justly condemned of laziness, until we frame our life to the command and calling of God (Lessnoff 1994:85)

This highlights the beginnings of what came to be known as Protestant work ethic. Once again, Calvin, in “The Institutes of the Christian Religion” 1581 (Sage Digital Library), comments on Genesis 22:16-18:

Here assuredly we see without ambiguity that God rewards the works of believers with blessings which he had given them before the works were thought of, there still being no cause for the blessings which he bestows but his own mercy (Chapter 18 section 3).

An inference is made here that the approval of God can be related to material blessings.

Sedgwick (1999:157) maintains that there seems to be empirical evidence that there was a change in the behaviour of merchants, employers and labourers:

The Calvinist emphasis on stewardship gave labourers an interest in increasing the return on their labour (Sedgwick 1999:157).

As a result of this change in behaviour there developed a work force that functioned to a new time and work discipline.

Marshall makes an exceptionally interesting comment on the attitude of the medieval labourer:

Voluntary underemployment in medieval and late-medieval Europe manifested itself in such phenomena as the spontaneous taking of holidays, long hours spent socializing in the home and the tavern, the unhurried pace of life, the discontinuous pattern of work caused by frequent stoppages for recreation, late arrivals for work, and early departures from it and so forth. (Marshall 1993:125)

This was replaced by a work ethic that regarded hard work as part of one's Christian lifestyle.

This development resulted in a dedication to hard work inculcated by the work ethic, combined with frugality in living derived from the Calvinist ethic, leading to a rapid accumulation of wealth. This wealth was seen as God's approval on the enterprises of the Protestant Christian business world. There followed a period in the history of the church that is marked by a movement toward increased spiritual involvement by the masses. This general increase in religion was a factor in the development of modern capitalism (Fukuyama 2005:1). Therefore it would be incorrect to blame Calvin for this trend when it was the general freeing of man to use the creation that gave rise to this development. This work ethic should not have led to indulgence but rather to frugality and to a sharing with those in need because of the emphasis in Protestant theology on the proper stewardship of possessions and resources. However, to quote Sedgwick:

The development of capitalist wealth corrupts the soul by its indulgence (Sedgwick 1999:157).

Sedgwick, earlier on in his book (1999:3), in a comment on the relationship between consumption and work, states that the place of aesthetics and the Romantic movement can be shown in the transformation of a work ethic into an ethic of consumption. Men began to accumulate possessions simply for their aesthetic beauty and not for practical reasons of need thus resulting in an accumulation of wealth.

A further point has to be made that the Reformation created a value to work for its own sake rather than for its results (see Sedgwick 1999:157 and Weber, quoted in Sedgwick). This movement did not take place in the Catholic areas resulting in a subsequent lack of growth. This is born out in a comment made by Fukuyama:

The Catholic parts of Europe were slower to modernize economically than the Protestant areas, and they took longer to reconcile themselves to democracy (Fukuyama 2005:5).

This Protestant work ethic has become detached from religion with its constraints on greed and has become part of rational science-based capitalism (see Sedgwick's chapter on consumerism. 1999:82-150). The result of this has been the removal of the good stewardship restraints of the Protestant work ethic giving rise to the individualism and greed of Capitalism. Many writers have contributed to the discussion on this subject (see for instance, Clapp, Kavanagh, Moore, Report for the Norwegian Bishops Conference, Weber, and more). Tawney makes a telling comment that sums up developments during this stage:

A new sanction had been found in the identification of labour and enterprise with the service of God. The world exists, not to be enjoyed, but to be conquered. Only its conqueror deserves the name of Christian. For such a philosophy, the question, 'What shall it profit a man?' carries no sting. In winning the world, he wins the salvation of his own soul as well (Tawney 1948:247).

2.7. Modernity and the rise of capitalism from mediaeval times to the 20th Century

In this section I give explanations of modernity and capitalism. The constraints of space have forbidden me giving anything but a superficial explanation of these concepts.

The bridge between the age of the Reformation, the Renaissance and modernity may be found in the emergence of the Enlightenment (Brown 1969:38-39). During this period man became the centre and God was pushed more and more to the periphery. This paved the way for the individualism that has permeated Capitalism and resulted in possessions, or the lack of them, being the criterion by which mankind's blessedness and value is judged. This thesis cannot trace the development of the three centuries leading from the Reformation to the Enlightenment. However, much has been done in this regard (see Brown 1969, Richardson 1963).

Modernity is assessed and described by Balcomb in a paper entitled, "Modernity and the African Experience" (2005). For the purposes of this chapter a basic description of modernity will suffice.

Modernity is a way of understanding and ordering the experiences of life. According to Balcomb:

Modernity is all about power. It is about learning how to master one's environment (Balcomb 2005:1).

This understanding of the need to manage and control the environment led to the freedom to use the created order for oneself. Out of this understanding emerged one of the basic tenets of

capitalism: the freedom to exploit the created order for gain.

Capitalism may be described as an economic system by which ownership of capital or wealth, the production and distribution of goods, and the reward of labour are entrusted to, and affected by private enterprise (The New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary. 1976:236)

There are three basic origins posited for the birth and rise of capitalism:

1. Marx understands the birthplace as being a perpetuation of the domination of life by the large landowners who maintained domination and progress by moving from using serfs to using labourers. (See Marx's, "Critiques and Debates about Critical Method", Sage Digital Library). Marx would see the kind of development posited by Weber as being mythical. Weber's thesis was that wealth and possessions derive to very rich people because they have simply worked harder and been more astute. Marx saw the development of capitalism as deriving from an already existent body of wealth accumulated through mainly political domination. This was done through land grabbing, by enclosing common land, by military conquests etc. At a later stage these same powerful landowners were able to seize control of the production processes in the role of manufacturers (Das Kapital 1:8 quoted in Sayer, above). Marx, therefore, maintained the perpetuation of wealth in the hands of the landed class.

2. Sombart put forward the argument that unlimited expansion and economic rationality was the ethos of modern capitalism (Sedgwick 1999:153). He dates the beginning of capitalism to 13th Century Italy before the Black Death. It then passed through a dormant period before re-emerging and growing in the 16th Century and finally gaining dominance in Europe by the start of the 19th century. He understands Judaism as being the main influence in Western medieval Europe and emphasizes the different commercial dealings that were allowed between Jew and Gentile, such as the use of usury, which allowed Jewish merchants to accumulate great wealth in finance and trade which eventually developed an economic ethic across Europe (Sedgwick 1999:153).

This pattern was established and imitated in the communities where the Jews settled.

3. Weber wrote into a developed sociological and historical tradition. (Sedgwick 1999:154) and his purpose was to challenge Sombart's thesis and show that the roots of capitalism lay in the Protestant Reformation. He especially wanted to show the roots as being in the Calvinism of Northern Europe (see "The Renaissance and Reformation Period" above). Weber's concern was Sombart's portrayal of the spirit of capitalism as that of ruthless, restless acquisition and he wanted to show that it did not agree with modern capitalism at all. Weber then redefined the spirit of capitalism itself. He understood modern capitalism as being rooted in risk-minimizing and

profit-maximizing strategy (Sedgwick 1999:154). Weber's analysis of modern capitalism was that it was essentially ascetic with a restriction on capital once it had been earned. (See Sedgwick 1999: 154) Up until this time the accumulation of money was not seen as being commendable and modest profits were the order of the day. However, Marshall (1993:54) maintains that by the 18th century money making was considered the essence of moral conduct, even commanded in the name of duty.

Through the Protestant emphasis on the moral worth of work a different understanding of the accumulation of wealth began to emerge (Sedgwick 1999:155). In this regard the influence of the Puritans in the development of consumerism also needs to be mentioned. They formed part of the basis for the theory that success in business was a sign of God's approval, a theory that became a significant influence in Protestant capitalism. Peter Stubbley says:

Joseph Milner, the school headmaster in Hull, epitomized both the old Puritan ethic (he could preach on the Godly man being useful and redeeming the time,) and the new Evangelical one (the excessive love of gain eating out the love of Christ) (Stubbley 1995:10).

There thus developed an understanding of contentment in the Protestant church as far as possessions were concerned. An illustration of this was the strange dichotomy that developed in the approach of the church members in Hull; deep piety paralleled by huge money making enterprises (Sedgwick 1999: 158). Stubbley in examining the era speaks of "pietistic" merchants.

Kumar, quoting Hirschman, makes mention of capitalism appealing to many thinkers and statesmen in the 17th and 18th centuries, not because of any alleged positive virtues, but because, to an age frightened and exhausted by the continuous civil and international wars of the 17th century, the interest in money making appeared an altogether safer channel for the people's unruly energies than more exciting pursuits such as power and glory (1988:58-59).

A further factor influencing the change in productivity, parallel to the change in attitude to work on the part of the labour force, was the imposition by factory employers of a high degree of discipline.

Ever since the end of the Middle Ages, and particularly as a result of the increasing frequency of war and civil war in the 17th and 18th centuries, the search was on for a behavioural equivalent for religious precept, for new rules of conduct and devices that would impose much needed discipline and constraints on both rulers and ruled, and the expansion of commerce and industry was thought to hold much promise in this regard (Hirschman 1977:129)

In support of this notion Kumar maintains that the rise of capitalism would not have been

possible without the co-operation of the medieval feudal society. In some way the future of the feudal lords lay in embracing capitalism, which they pursued with vigour.

The result of this pursuit of capitalism has been the development of a consumer society in most of the Western world with an emphasis on the accumulation of possessions. In support of this proposition there is a large body of literature on consumerism from a sociological perspective (see Bocoock 1988, Galbraith 1987, Lunt & Livingstone 1992, MacPherson 1973 and more). For the purpose of this chapter a brief description of consumerism will need to suffice. Rudmin describes consumerism as:

A culture of consumption is one that is dominated by mass produced goods such that consumption and its related behaviours attain a central position in the lives of society's members. Possessions then become tied to life satisfaction (Rudmin 1991:404).

Rudmin has a further comment in support of the notion that possessions have become the yardstick for measuring the meaningfulness of life:

Several writers have suggested that for materialistic persons, consumer products engage values that are centrally held, serve as a source of meaning, and provide structures for life's goals and daily activities. (Rudmin 1991:404)

This leads to individual worth being defined through the ownership and consumption of objects. Who we are is then based on what we have, and this is the essence of consumerism.

Another development, the Industrial Revolution, began in the first half of the 18th century. The coming of machines had a detrimental effect on cottage industries and resulted in the increase of factories. (Scott Latourette 1958:vol.1:131). The publication of Adam Smith's book, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* advocated free enterprise as the route to be taken. I cannot expand on the concept of free enterprise except to note that it was one of the steps leading to the development of capitalism. The occasion of the French Revolution encouraged breaking down the gap between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. This further encouraged the rise of a middle class capitalistic element in society.

Space prohibits an examination of the development of the rise of reforms against the abuses of the industrial revolution and the slave trade. There is ample material available in the writings of Kumar, Sayer and Sedgwick.

The Ecumenical Movement in the 20th Century began at the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference where the conference sought to recover the unity of all Christian believers in Christ by setting aside creedal, ritual and polity differences and by expressing that unity in conference with a view to the ultimate reunion of the churches. Two main streams emerged from this, the one

dealing with matters of Life and Work, and the other with Faith and Order. It is the former stream that is of consequence for this thesis. The Life and Work stream sought to apply Christian standards in matters of social, economic and political life. The two streams flowed separately for about three decades before joining together in the formation of the World Council of Churches at a meeting in the Concertgebou in Amsterdam on the 23rd August 1948 (Cross 1958:977 & 1477).

An interesting comment by Emil Brunner in a background document for the founding assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam may help in gaining some understanding of the council's approach to consumerism and the ownership and stewardship of possessions. Brunner said that the modern world has lost the horizon of transcendence. This is the basic fact of the social disorder. As Fortman & Goldewijk (undated: 19) state, crucial to such reflections is the relationship between God and the goods. While the condemnation of individual materialism goes right back to the early church Fortman & Goldewijk maintain that there is a need for a negative response from Christians to the prevailing economy. This is reflected in the concluding statement to the Sao Paulo WCC meeting in 1987 where a plea was made for congregations, churches and Christian groups to join in resisting the evil manifestation of the prevailing economic system as a fundamental matter of Christian faith and confession (Churches, Christians and Economic Systems: a Call for Obedient Discipleship).

The WCC has taken a stand against the prevailing international economic order and describes that order as enslaving and dividing. (Fortman & Goldewijk: undated: 19 & 20, see also the article by Lechner 2002, "World Council of Churches and Capitalism). Fortman & Goldewijk assess the present attitude of both the Catholic Church and the WCC as being one of critical valuation. Much has been published about the inequalities in the social order of our world. However, Fortman & Goldewijk comment:

Despite the development of a relatively coherent body of socio-economic thinking in both the Roman Catholic Church and the ecumenical movement, the extent to which one can speak of this response being incorporated into daily economic life remains doubtful. Christianity is still faced with the challenge of relevant and effective response to a world in economic disorder (Fortman & Goldewijk undated: 31).

One of the approaches adopted by the WCC has been to focus on the most vulnerable groups in geographical regions and seek to protect them from the regions where globalisation is occurring (Sedgwick 1999:213). This stems from the inability of local national governments to plan for the future. The third world is increasingly left behind in the wake of globalisation and benefits less and less in comparison to the developed nations. Globalisation is depriving the poor in third world nations of possessions and even the basic needs of everyday life. Sedgwick (1999: 217)

makes mention of the critical stance of the WCC towards the sustaining of an environment of stable industrialization by the poor states because the optimistic view of the industrialized nations does not take account of the great suffering and poverty which is found in Africa and Asia.

2.8. Conclusion

The changes in the understanding of possessions from the time of the amphictyony, where a very communal understanding prevailed, to the time of the monarchy where a more individualistic approach became the norm was similar to the developments during the transition from the Patristic period to the Enlightenment. The resistance by numerous prophets, especially as referred to above, is reflected in the gradual opposition to the growth of capitalism and is reflected in the numerous writings of the Christian economists and the World Council of Churches. The failure of the people of God to practice the Jubilee points to the growing materialism of the nation and is also found in the growing materialism of the Western church as it succumbs to consumerism (see Duchrow 1999).

The Bible passages examined in this chapter have all tended to emphasise the need for proper stewardship of resources. The Old Testament Jubilee was a definite instruction that everything had to be returned to its original pattern every fifty years. There is also an emphasis on sharing of resources in the New Testament passages, especially within the community of faith. This same emphasis on sharing resources is continued throughout the Patristic and Mediaeval periods pointing to an ongoing value that possessions are to be held in trust and that proper stewardship is of vital importance.

Calvin's teaching on the value of work as well as the successful accumulation of wealth being evidence of God's favour began a new era in the understanding of land, goods and possessions. While still maintaining the need for sharing with the poor, laziness was condemned and frugality and the accumulation of wealth lauded. This change occurred during the period surveyed above under "modernity and the rise of capitalism". In spite of differences in the understanding of the origins and development of capitalism, what does emerge is a clear understanding that there were many factors involved in this development (see Kumar 1988:38 & 39). An exhaustive exposition of the development of capitalism from mediaeval times to the times of the Puritan movement has been offered by Tawney in a fairly old publication (1948) giving a good understanding of the link between the two.

This ongoing bent toward individualistic consumerism in the Western church has had a detrimental effect upon the churches in the third world as the "unstoppable train" of Western

society smashes into the “unbroken circle” of traditional culture, especially in Africa (see Balcomb 2005 unpublished). This development resulted in a very definite change in the approach to private property and possessions resulting in diverse opinions regarding the use and stewardship of such possessions. In the next chapter I trace and analyse this resulting development and the affect of different world-views upon a notion of possessions in the African church context. Tawney makes a critical observation regarding the rise of capitalism, drawing together some of the observations made by the previous authors examined in this chapter:

Modern capitalism is absolutely irreligious, without internal union, without much public spirit, often, though not always, a mere congeries of possessors and pursuers. It is that whole system of appetites and values, with its deification of the life of snatching to hoard, and hoarding to snatch, which now, in the hour of its triumph, while the plaudits of the crowd still ring in the ears of the gladiators and the laurels are still un-faded on their brows, seems sometimes to leave a taste of ashes on the lips of a civilisation which has brought to the conquest of its material environment resources unknown in earlier ages, but which has not yet learned to master itself (Tawney 1948:280).



Chapter three

Historical factors that have influenced a theology of possessions

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I endeavoured to lay a foundation for a theology of possessions from an historical perspective by tracing the development of various economic streams as well as the development of capitalism and its affect upon an understanding of possessions.

In this chapter I lay a further foundation by examining various non-theological factors that have shaped notions of possessions such as historical and contextual contexts. This is a logical progression from the historical developments in this field.

These non-theological factors are numerous and would include worldviews, cosmologies, economic systems, social constructs, etc. Economic factors influencing an understanding of possessions would include feudalism, capitalism, African socialism, Marxism, a subsistence economy and more. In this chapter I deal with three of the factors impinging upon a theology of possessions, namely, worldviews, economic systems and different systems of ownership.

3.2. Worldviews

I do not attempt an in depth examination of worldviews as this has already been done by numerous contributors (See Balcomb, Bate, Magesa, Mbiti, Van der Walt and others). In this section I give a basic understanding of worldviews, a definition of them and the impact of those worldviews on life's praxis. Many scholars have put forward a description of what a worldview is. The following limited number of contributions will suffice:

A worldview is a coherent collection of concepts and theorems that must allow us to construct a global image of the world, and in this way to understand as many elements of our experience as possible. A world view is a system of co-ordinates or a frame of reference in which everything presented to us by our diverse experiences can be placed. It is a symbolic system of representation that allows us to integrate everything we know about the world and ourselves into a global picture, one that illuminates reality as it is presented to us within a certain setting. Worldview construction consists of an attempt to develop worldviews that take into account as much as possible all aspects of our experience (Balcomb 2005:2).

Worldview is the way that people of a culture make sense out of the world around them. The root metaphors and thematic clustering of culture texts is an expression of the attempt to make sense out of things. Clearly these themes are linked together in a complex pattern. And it is this pattern that represents the worldview (Bate 2002:115).

Cultures pattern perceptions of reality into conceptualisations of what reality can or should be, what is to be regarded as actual, probable, possible and impossible. The worldview is the central systematisation of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system. The worldview lies at the very heart of the culture, touching, interfacing with, and strongly influencing every aspect of culture (Kraft 1979:53).

A word picture (which describes what is) has the tendency to develop into a worldview (what ought to be), which gives direction and meaning to life. In the case of a world picture reality is viewed as similar to an organism or a machine, while in the case of a worldview reality is really an organism or machine, the picture has become a design, standard or model according to which reality has to be structured (Van der Walt 2003:100).

In summarizing the four expressions of worldview cited above, the most straightforward explanation of a world view would be to describe it as a way of viewing life in order to make sense out of it and be able to explain the happenings which form that life.

Bate gives five major functions of worldviews that I have summarised below:

1. Explanatory function. To explain why the world is the way it is. It provides explanations for the functioning of nature, explaining how and why things are and what makes them change or continue.
2. Evaluatory function. To facilitate ways of making right decisions about what is right behaviour and what is wrong behaviour. It is a value system for forming judgements as to what is good and what is bad.
3. Reinforcing function tells people to go on behaving in one particular way and to avoid behaving in another way. A worldview thus enforces certain behaviour patterns, group names, values and beliefs. This function is crucial in moments of crisis as it provides a place to retreat into. Often people return to childhood beliefs in a time of crisis.
4. Integrating function links together all the different parts of behaviour within the culture so that they will make sense. The culture then has an integrating identity that allows people who accept the culture to also accept the identity of that culture.
5. Adaptive function explains the way the culture adapts to change. This includes rules and ways in which change can come. The Western system uses the scientific method as one form of adaptation. It uses technology as another. African systems are concerned with relationships involved in change. They attempt to find ways to incorporate change into the whole through processes of agreement and will reject change if this process fails (Bate 2002:116-118).

One needs to ask which worldviews play a role in current African discussions? This continent is

a vast mix of different cultural influences coming from a variety of worldviews. For instance, the colonial powers each brought their own particular approach to life with them. The influence of such diverse worldviews as modern, primal, vestiges of the enlightenment, German, French revolution, and British Industrial Revolution among many more needs to be taken into account, nor can major influence of the Islamic worldview on Africa be discounted. (For an examination of these influences see Conradie 2005:1-3). All these have had an impact on traditional African culture and worldviews. However, the major influences examined in this thesis are those of modernity (as expressed in a Western worldview) and primal African culture (as expressed in an African worldview).

3.2.1. A Western worldview, while incorporating the understanding of individualism, has as its dominant element a secular outlook on life. The following explanation of a secular view is helpful:

To think secularly is to think within a frame of reference bounded by the limits of our life on earth: it is to keep one's calculations rooted in this-worldly criteria (Blamires 1978:44).

Anyone approaching life from this perspective would be extremely suspicious of anything not susceptible to empirical examination, especially a worldview that incorporates the unseen. According to Balcomb, modernity displays a dualistic approach to reality (see Balcomb 2005:7) that has brought huge levels of control over the environment and at the same time resulted in alienation from the environment.

By the nineteenth century materialism was entrenched in the Western worldview. Materialism assumes that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications. This developed into what Bate calls the gradual erosion of the power of the supernatural and the emergence of the human as the most important category (Bate 2002:120). This understanding consolidates an individualistic approach to ownership. Nurnberger expresses the materialistic approach of capitalism thus:

Its view of reality became mechanistic and optimistic, evolutionary and progress oriented, its ethic required the active subjugation and transformation of all aspects of reality to the advantage of the human being" (Nurnberger 1988:348).

It is the societal keys to a Western worldview that are of significance for this thesis. The mainstays of these societal keys are: private ownership of property, economics and a money economy, science and technology, change expressed in terms of progress or development and capitalism becoming a belief system.

It needs to be noted that capitalism is as much an ideology as Marxism to the extent that it is seen

as a panacea for the world's ills.

Because of the focus on the individual a resultant disparity with African culture emerges. I will highlight this divergence in the next section of this chapter.

The difference of approach is to be found in the way Western people have a freedom to make economic decisions according to purely personal criteria (Maranz 2001:202). This freedom to choose exists in all areas of a Westerner's life. Within the constraints of his own finances he may choose his own lifestyle, what he accumulates, what possessions he owns and what property he possesses. Unlike his African counterpart he has few constraints on the use of his resources, including possessions and property. He may choose whether he will help or share his resources with his family (extended or close) his friends or his community (see Maranz 2001:202). While somewhat of a generalisation, the previous sentence does give an overall understanding of one of the tenets of capitalism as regards possessions, that is to say, individual ownership. The conclusion may be made that the literature thus far examined shows that a Western worldview is individualistic, materialistic and consumer driven.

A summary of this view is given by Van der Walt and is captured in the following chart:



Western Individualism

Individual self-concept

Independence

Survival of the individual

Personal gratification

Competition and conflict

Ownership

Individual rights (Van der Walt 2003:133).

With regard to the above listing, Balcomb considers the whole modernist Western culture as being an unstoppable train. (Referred to in an unpublished paper presented to the IMF titled "The Unbroken Circle and the Unstoppable Train") Globalisation is running at speed into the traditional cultures of our world and overwhelming them. The origins of this Western culture may be found in Greek and Hebrew perceptions of reality (Balcomb 2005:2). These have formed the basis for modernity and need to be briefly explained.

The contribution of the Greeks was in the field of empirical research and that of the Hebrews in terms of a linear approach to history (Balcomb 2005: 2).

The Greeks removed the environment from the mystical allowing man to investigate and use it.

The Hebrews introduced a new understanding of history, moving it from the cyclical to the linear, thereby bringing an understanding of goal and purpose into life. This Western view considers the individual as being distinct from the environment and in control of it (see Balcomb 2005:2).

In the light of the title of this thesis it is more relevant to focus on the African worldview. In the next section of this chapter I give a more in depth understanding of the African worldview.

3.2.2. An African worldview stands in direct contrast to a Western worldview and may be encapsulated in v. d. Walt's description of African communalism (2003:133). This chart from Van der Walt is a helpful starting point for examining an African worldview:

African Communalism

Communal self-concept
Interdependence
Survival of the community
Group assurance
Co-operation and harmony
Affiliation
Shared duties

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These two worldviews stand in direct opposition to each other (see Magesa, Mbiti, Taylor etc.). I will leave an examination of this dichotomy for the next section of this chapter.

Community is particularly predominant in African traditional culture. This means that existence is always seen in relation to the tribe / clan or community. According to African philosophy a person is a person through, with and for the community. Individualism is something new to Africa (Kasenene 1994:141). This view of the individual may be observed in the meaning of the created order in African culture. African traditional culture understands all of life to be linked. Even the ancestors are in the circle that needs to be kept in harmony. An African worldview is thus a primal worldview and I need to say one or two things about primal worldviews. The following quote offers a good starting point:

Every scholar observing primal thought, from Levy-Bruhl in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to Placide Tempels in the mid twentieth century to Alexis Kagame, to V.Y. Mudimbe, and John Mbiti have commented on the oneness of the universe in primal thinking that Taylor so graphically describes (Balcomb 2005:6).

What Balcomb is referring to here is the statement by Taylor that defines his analysis of primal thinking. Taylor expounds on the unity of all life in the following manner:

Not only is there less separation between subject and object, between self and non-self, but fundamentally all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another, rocks and forest trees, beasts and serpents, the power of the wind and waves upon a ship, the power of a drum over a dancers body, the power in the mysterious caves of Kokola, the living, the dead and the first ancestors, from the stone to the divinities and hierarchy of power but not of being, for all are one, all are here, all are now (Taylor 1975:64).

The essence of this thinking is the relatedness of all things, the interaction of everything upon everything, without any existence in isolation. As I have stated before, the concept of separate beings that find themselves together yet entirely independent of one another, is foreign to Bantu thought. Thus the interconnectedness of all things filters down into the African understanding of being authentically human; it is connectedness and not isolation!

Bediako maintains that there are six features of the African worldview and the following is a summary of such features:

1. A sense of kinship with nature. This includes all things as being interdependent parts of the whole.
2. A definite acceptance of the weakness and finiteness of humankind and the need for supernatural intervention.
3. The existence of a spiritual world that means that humankind is not alone in the universe. The influence of this spiritual world results in the question being, not what causes things to happen, but who causes things to happen.
4. Human beings can enter into relationship with that spirit world.
5. A belief in the after life expressed in reverence for the ancestors.
6. No dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual with the possibility of the physical being a vehicle for the spiritual (Balcomb 2005:12).

When one examines illness and healing in a primal culture this understanding of relatedness becomes clearer (For a more complete examination of this see Balcomb's paper, "The unbroken circle and the unstoppable train" 2005 unpublished). In a more scientifically based culture the causes of illness will be sought in physical, chemical or environmental factors. The cure would then involve medical, surgical or counselling intervention (see Bate 2002:109). The focus in this case would be on the individual. However, in a primal situation the emphasis would be on restoring the circle of life. This would combine physical health, spiritual and inter-relational harmony. A variety of remedies would be used, usually focusing on inter-relational causes such as ancestors, spirits, other people or witchcraft (Bate 2002:110). This is further evidence of the inter-relatedness of life expressed in a primal approach that encompasses all things, as all things are assumed to contain life. In his paper on worldviews (2005:7) Balcomb quotes Mudimbe giving a summary of Kagame's analysis of "ntu" or "being". In sum, the ntu is somehow a sign of

universal similitude. Its presence in beings brings them to life and attests to both their individual value and to the measure of their integration in the dialectic of vital energy. Ntu is both a uniting and a differentiating vital norm that explains the powers of vital inequality in terms of difference between beings. It is a sign that God, father of all beings, has put a stamp on the universe, thus making it transparent in a hierarchy of sympathy. Upwards one would read the vitality that, from mineral through vegetable, animal and human, links stones to the departed and God himself. Downwards, it is a genealogical filiation of forms of beings, engendering or relating to one another, all of them witnessing to the original source that made them possible (see Balcomb 2005:7). As Balcomb states in relation to the above:

The interconnectedness of the universe, beginning with the creator and going all the way down to rocks, can surely not be more strongly stated (Balcomb 2005:7).

This view of life was referred to as animism in the past and the description still has application today. The understanding that everything is being interpenetrated by spiritual forces and under their control aptly describes a primal worldview. Van der Walt says that:

The Africans do not really distinguish between the physical and spiritual modes of existence. They have a holistic or organic worldview (Van der Walt 2003:62).

We could then conclude that a primal worldview is essentially an organic view of reality that borders on being pantheistic as it blurs the distinctions between the material and the supernatural. Turaki expresses it thus:

Nature, man and the spirit world constitute one fluid coherent unit (Turaki 1993:250).

The influence of the spirit world is extremely powerful in African society and reflects the pre-eminence of this world in the minds of African people. This may be seen in the way that even Christians who have embraced the Christian world view or even devotees of Islam will, in difficult times when problems or crises arise, revert back to traditional beliefs involving the spirit world. (see Balcomb 2005:1 for the finding that 80% of black South Africans consult a witchdoctor at some time).

According to Setiloane (2000:28) **seriti** (the vital force) is a portion of and of the same quality as the immanent, all pervasive, omnipotent divinity, **Modimo**. This understanding lies behind a further statement he makes in which the integral nature of all life as understood in primal society becomes clear. The human being is therefore a tributary of the primary all generating vital force, of the same essence as the great source of life (Setiloane 2000:58). This same unity would apply to the ancestors (see Van der Walt 2003:66).

In addition to the influence of worldviews on an understanding of possessions there are a number

of economic systems and ideologies that play a role in the forming of a theology of possessions in the African church and I give a short description of such systems, giving more attention to the two which most affect the African church, namely, capitalism and a subsistence economy.

3.3. Economic systems

I have chosen to restrict this thesis to the following systems as I consider them as being of relevance to the African context and a brief explanation of each follows.

Capitalism, socialism, feudalism, Marxism and a subsistence economy are some of the diverse economies that have influenced Africa. In order to highlight the differences in these two systems I give brief explanations of the others mentioned.

3.3.1. Socialism

A dictionary description of socialism will serve as a starting point for this section:

Socialism is a political and economic principle that the community as a whole should have ownership and control of all means of production and distribution (New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary 1976:1602).

Kwame Nkrumah (1967:1) describes socialism as a complex of social purposes and the consequential social and economic policies, organisational patterns, state structure and ideologies that can lead to the attainment of those purposes.

He sees the 'purposes' mentioned as the re-moulding of African society in the socialist direction. A comment he makes regarding communalism adds light to understanding Socialism. He states that only under socialism can we reliably accumulate the capital we need for our development and also ensure that the gains of investment are applied for the general welfare (Nkrumah 1976:7). Of import in this statement is the reference to 'the general welfare'. Hoppe, on the other hand, describes socialism as an institutionalised interference with or aggression against private property and private property claims (Hoppe 1990:4). In an extremely critical assessment of socialism he describes what he views as the negatives of socialism while giving an inadvertent pointer to the make-up of socialism.

The highly visible positive effects of socialist policies such as 'cheap food prices', 'low rents', 'free this and free that' are not just positive things hanging in midair, unconnected to everything else, but rather are phenomena that have to be paid for somehow; by less and lower quality food, by housing shortages, by decay and slums, by queuing up and corruption, and, further, by lower living standards, reduced capital formation and/or increased capital consumption (Hoppe 1990:5).

This effect may be seen in various examples such as East Germany, from a Marxist socialist

perspective, and Zambia under Kaunda from a British socialist perspective (see Nkrumah 1967 and Hoppe 1990). In the light of the subject of this thesis mention needs to be made of the phenomenon called African socialism. Nkrumah sees this form of socialism as a synthesis of modern technology with human values resulting in an advanced technical society that avoids the deep schisms of capitalist industrial society. His concern is that true economic and social development cannot be promoted without the real socialisation of productive and distributive processes (see Nkrumah 1967:4). In a socialist economy all people should have equal access to resources and the means of production as well as the fruits of labour. Unfortunately the axiom, all people are equal but some are more equal than others, spoils the ideology of socialism.

3.3.2. Feudalism

A dictionary definition of feudalism would be:

A system in medieval European life based on the relationship between superior and vassal arising from the holding of lands in feud; a system by which land was held on behalf of a superior in return for services which included military service, homage, and more (Coulson 1976:616).

It is important to note that, according to Nkrumah, feudalism was known and practiced quite widely in the African context. This is not generally expressed in popular literature dealing with African culture and economic systems.

All available evidence from the history of Africa up to the eve of European colonising shows that African society was neither classless nor devoid of a social hierarchy. Feudalism existed in some parts of Africa before colonisation; and feudalism involves a deep and exploitative social stratification, founded on the ownership of land (Nkrumah 1967:3).

The Catholic Encyclopaedia on CD-ROM, in its article on feudalism gives the following description:

Feudalism is a contractual system by which the nation, as represented by the king, lets its land out to individuals who pay rent by doing governmental work not merely in the shape of military service but also of suit to the king's court (2005:1).

In dealing with leaders in an African context my experience has been that this system still prevails in parts of Africa. In Rundu in northern Namibia the church approached the queen of the area to be granted some land on the riverbank in order to grow vegetables. This was granted under certain conditions of homage that had to be paid in the form of a portion of the crop. In Zambia this system was also in use in Kasempa where the pastor of the church approached the chief (king?) for a piece of ground. Once again there was a portion to be paid back for the permission to use the land. The conclusion to be made here is that feudalism is still a very relevant system of economics in the African context, particularly when it comes to rural areas.

Another system of definite relevance in the African context is:

3.3.3. Marxism (Communism)

There has been a profound influence upon African society by the numbers of African leaders trained in Communist universities as well as many Africans who went to Communist countries for military training. The fact that there is still a Communist party in South Africa is of significance as it relates to Marxism's influence on African economic thinking.

Hoppe gives the following analysis of Marxism. Traditional Marxist policy has four characteristics:

A policy of nationalising or socialising the means of production, or rather, the expropriation of private owners means of production,

A revisionist, social-democratic policy of egalitarian income redistribution,

A conservatively minded policy of attempting to preserve the status quo through economic and behavioural regulations and price controls,

Marxism is a technocratic system of pragmatic, piecemeal, social and economic engineering and intervention (Hoppe 1990:5).

Marxism is given further definition by the Catholic Encyclopaedia:

The main feature of socialism is the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange (2005 under "Marxism" article 16).

Karl Marx himself wrote that in a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and the antithesis between mental and physical labour have vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of the co-operative wealth flow more abundantly; only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe upon its banners: 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' (Catholic encyclopaedia 2005). It seems to me that these were noble aspirations that did not take into account the inherent selfishness and power seeking in human beings that displayed itself in the leaders of the Communist Party and caused them to succumb to forces that belied the idealism of Marx.

Two main systems of economics operative in Africa remain and I first examine capitalism and then subsistence economics in this next section.

3.3.4. Capitalism

As the world experiences globalisation, this system of economics is rapidly becoming the predominant system in the world. Hoppe describes capitalism as:

A social system based on the explicit recognition of private property and of non-aggressive, contractual exchanges between private property owners (Hoppe 1990:4).

It would be appropriate, in the light of Hoppe's statement, to observe that basic capitalism is represented in what is termed a free market economy. This is an economy where economic decisions are made through the free market mechanism.

The forces of market demand and supply, without any government intervention, determine how resources are allocated (tutor2u 2005:1).

According to the Centre for Economic Conversion (Internet 2005) capitalist economies emphasise individual freedom. This statement is in agreement with Adam Smith's understanding of human beings (Smith is regarded as the founder of capitalism). Smith believed that:

Human beings are by nature interested only in their own gain and hypothesised that the common good could be attained if everyone sought what was best for him/her individually (Internet 2005:2).

Another of Adam Smith's sayings is of application here:

Every individual is continually exerting himself to find the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of society, which he has in view. But the study of his own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily, leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society (Sider 1981:39).

When tied in with the concept of private property alluded to above, one would describe the basics of capitalism as follows:

What to produce is decided upon by the profitability for a particular product.

When demand for a product is high, the price rises and this raises the profitability of selling in the market.

High prices and high profits provide the signal for firms to expand production.

Supply from producers responds to consumer wants and needs expressed through the price mechanism.

The consumer is said to be sovereign – their 'economic votes' determine how resources are allocated. (tutor 2u 2005:2 internet).

Rudmin describes a key marker of capitalism as:

The severance of economy from society and the subsequent emphasis on an individual ethos associated with material gains. In this system individual identity is defined through the ownership and consumption of objects and objects are used to construct, deconstruct, differentiate, extend and integrate the self with others (Rudmin 1991:386).

I have offered the above definitions of capitalism as they define the major tenets of this form of economics in a way that makes it easy to understand and also because of their relevance for this thesis. The system of capitalism may be summed up as follows: In a capitalist system definition

of self and worth is based on possessions and their worth. Life derives meaning through consumption (or the ability to accumulate). This attitude may be summed up as, serve yourself and the community will benefit. The features that are of significance for this thesis are that capitalism evidences a basically selfish approach to life, an extreme individualism, and a lack of concern for the poor as well as a denial of community.

In direct contrast to capitalism is the economic system involved in subsistence economy.

3.3.5. Subsistence economy

A basic description of a subsistence economy is found in *Curriculum on Line: approaches to the fundamental economic problem* (2005:1):

There is little specialisation and trade within the economy and with other countries.

The productivity of workers tends to be low leading to low incomes and a poor standard of living.

People tend to live in family groups, and grow most of their own food, make their own houses, gather their own fuel and provide their own leisure activities i.e. to a great extent they are self sufficient.

Few goods are marketed and command a price or value – there is little surplus production to export.

Of relevance to this thesis is the fact that large parts of rural Africa still operate according to a subsistence economy. My experience in Africa bears this out, especially the reality that there is usually only just enough to sustain life and hardly ever anything left over for trading. Such subsistence economies cannot be relegated to the primitive past as if they no longer exist as large parts of Africa operate according to this form of economy.

Subsistence farmers all over the world rotate their crops, lay fields fallow periodically, and intercrop nitrogen rich and nitrogen poor plants so that their soils will remain in balance and productive for many generations to come. The awareness that human beings are inter-dependent with, and not independent of, the rest of nature is an important contribution of subsistence societies to the modern world (Centre for Economic Conversion 2005 internet: 2).

A subsistence economy has a very distinctive character as expressed by Bauer:

A large proportion of producers and consumers operate on a small scale and far from the major commercial centres, including the ports. Individual transactions are small. Individual farmers produce on a small scale and sell in even smaller quantities at frequent intervals because they lack storage facilities and substantial cash reserves. Conversely, because of their low incomes, consumers find it convenient or necessary to buy in small, often very small, amounts, again at frequent intervals. In these conditions the collection of produce and the physical distribution of consumer goods and of farm inputs are necessarily expensive in real terms. Storage, assembly,

bulking, transport, breaking of bulk, and distribution absorb a significant proportion of available resources (Bauer 2005: chapter 1).

There are also various forms of ownership that have contributed to an understanding of possessions in the African church and I examine some of these in the next section of this chapter.

3.4. Systems of ownership

In this section I examine the concepts of private property (individual ownership), communal ownership, and trusts. I endeavour to arrive at how they affect the means of production, fixed and moveable property, and possessions. In the process I touch upon the question of the ownership and use of land. All these concepts and understandings are pertinent to an understanding of possessions in the African church.

3.4.1. Private property, its development and effect upon an understanding of possessions

According to Adam Smith, the expectation of profit from improving one's stock of capital rests on private property rights, and the belief that property rights encourage the property holders to develop the property, generate wealth, and efficiently allocate resources based on the operation of the market is central to capitalism. From this expectation there evolved the modern conception of property as a right which is enforced by positive law, in the expectation that this would produce more wealth and better standards of living (Wikipedia: General characteristics of property). In this section I explore the progress of capitalism in developing individualism and the resulting attitude toward property and possessions. Private property, by the very nature of the term, implies ownership that is individual and restrictive. Magesa describes it as:

The acquisition and distribution of, or claim to, property. Such and such a thing is mine or ours, and not yours. I or we have the right to use, deny use, or dispose of it as I or we choose. When this right is granted to an individual or to a specific group of individuals within a given society, it is called private property (Magesa 1997:277).

The basic understanding in this description is exclusive rather than inclusive and tends to preclude sharing. Rudmin maintains that:

A key marker of the capitalist system is the severance of the economy from society and the subsequent emphasis on an individualist ethos associated with material gains (1991:386).

Once again there is a neglect of the wider group in favour of the gain of the individual. This

emphasis on the accumulation of goods played an important role in the development of individuality with regard to private ownership. While it is recognized that private property has always been a factor of human existence, to the extent that the ten commandments make covetousness of another's property unacceptable (Deuteronomy 5:21), it needs to be noted that, with the emergence of a merchant class and the subsequent emergence of the industrial revolution, there was a major change in the meaning attached to private property. Once property became the measure by which one's worth as well as one's being blessed by God or not was gauged (see the previous chapter), a far more individualistic understanding attached itself to property.

Central to capitalism is the view that people are separate individuals and that they are able to act freely in pursuit of whatever they see fit, whether to help or harm themselves, their families, groups or humanity (Nankivell 1978:13).

There is an innate selfishness in this statement that is reflected in the individualism that is part of a capitalist approach to possessions. Of direct relevance for this thesis is the clear implication that this places the individual above society. Schumaker (1973:62) understands this as reflective of our society, where people rarely put the interest of the group above their own interest. McClelland states that:

Capitalism believes that the best interests of society are met when all people act to serve their own self-interest in competition with others; so that society will benefit even if there is individual failure (McClelland 1967:222).

This is a clear echo of Adam Smith. This attitude sees the poverty of others as irrelevant as long as the individual is allowed free rein to accumulate for himself. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, capitalism was rooted in the Reformation and the Protestant work ethic that resulted in frugality, discipline and the accumulation of wealth. This approach to labour and possessions was common to the Puritans and they became an example of the end results of a proper Protestant work ethic. This individualism was furthered by the growth of the Industrial Revolution and the increased gap between rich and poor. However, the understanding of church and industry in the early stages of the development of capitalism was that being blessed with wealth placed one under an obligation to care for the poor. This value was gradually replaced by the individualism of the consumer society where the motivation is to have and to consume (Williams 1998:66). Adam Smith's dictum (quoted in Williams 1998:66) portrays this attitude; a man must be perfectly crazy if he does not employ all the stock that he commands and consume all that he can. Possessions then became the medium that gave security and peace. The accumulation of things became

obsessive for human kind and things were supposed to be the instruments of fulfilment. Of interest is the understanding that it was the ownership of possessions in their different forms that brought a sense of security. Within the context of the above one may conclude that the major cause of diversity between people is private possessions.

Possessions and property are seen as absolutely owned with the freedom to use, to manipulate or to transfer to others (Poggi 1983:70).

The understanding of the total ownership of property is one of the main tenets of capitalism, placing private property at the sole behest of the owner.

At this point it will be helpful to take another look at Van der Walt's description of individualism.

Western Individualism

Individual self-concept

Independence

Survival of the individual

Personal gratification

Competition and conflict

Ownership

Individual rights

Of significance in the above listing and of relevance for this thesis are the understandings of individual self-concept, independence, personal gratification, private ownership and individual rights. One could say that reflected in these facets is a focus on 'me and mine'. An observation made by Karl Marx in a manuscript titled "Private Property and Communism" comments on this:

Marx says that Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it---when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.---in short, when it is used by us (1844).

The above statement from Marx is a very good description of private ownership.

Many people see the Biblical passages that prohibit theft and other legal measures as being supportive of this concept of ownership (e.g. Ex.20: 15, Deut. 19:14, Lev. 19:13, etc.) (Williams 1998:122). Even the Jubilee can be seen to support the idea of the private ownership of property, however, the stronger meaning is the condemnation of the accumulation of property and wealth above what is needed (Foster 1980:71). Of particular interest here is an extract from the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Dealing with the right to property, the following is stated:

The African Charter has developed a new vision of property that is not found in the Universal Declaration of human rights or in the Global ethic. The African Charter

protects the right to property but provides that it may be encroached upon in the interest of public need or the general need of the community and in accordance with the provisions of appropriate laws (Declaration 1992: 12: Article 14).

There is an obvious attempt to protect the concept of private property, evidencing the influence of capitalism, whilst also making it possible for a communal aspect of property to be applied, albeit with compensation

The next system of ownership, which is of prime importance to most African theologians, is communality or communal ownership.

3.4.2. Communal Ownership

Communal Property systems describe ownership as belonging to the entire social and political unit, while corporate systems describe ownership as being attached to an identifiable group with an identifiable responsible individual: generally a family. The Roman property law was based on such a corporate system. Different societies may have different theories of property for differing types of ownership, as the above paragraph makes clear: land is collectively owned, improvements are individually owned, but may not be transferred outside of the community. Currently, anthropological theory relates the kind of kinship system - whether through one or both parents - with certain property theories, though this approach is in dispute. Essentially, it is very common among property systems to have the community own property where kinship is reckoned both through patrilineal and matrilineal systems, but property is owned by the family if only one method of reckoning is used. Exceptions to this rule have been documented, but it remains the prevailing assumption of tribal ownership (Wikipedia: Theories of property).

Van der Walt's description of African communalism (2003:133) will be a helpful starting point for examining the influence of an African worldview on the traditional understanding of possessions.

African Communalism

Communal self-concept

Interdependence

Survival of the community

Group assurance

Co-operation and harmony

Affiliation

Shared duties

This concept of communalism is to be observed in the understanding of the meaning of the

created order in African culture. African traditional culture understands all of life to be linked. Even the ancestors are in the circle that has to be kept in harmony. Kasenene (1994:144) makes the point that African theology has a message for all those who are economically deprived. The solution lies in the understanding of communality in African culture. Kasenene understands this to be a result of the roots of African theology resting in the Christian ethic of love as well as African communitarian living. He sees the two understandings of life as being mutually compatible. Magesa makes a telling comment on communal ownership in the African context by his observation that, in an African context, the earth is given to mankind as a free gift with all mankind possessing an equal claim to it and the resources it offers. This understanding is reinforced by the understanding that, in the strict sense:

In African thought there cannot be private ownership of land and the natural resources under the ground (Magesa 1997:61).

The notion that the universe has been lent to humanity by God through the ancestors and the living leaders on the condition of good stewardship and common usage in order to promote the good of the group or clan is a good basic description of communal ownership.

In a society where communal ownership of goods is prevalent there is a tendency for the members to see the community as being identical with the individual (see Van der Walt 2003:135). The identifying of the individual with the community is dealt with by both Van der Walt (2003:184-186) and Bate (2002:121). Van der Walt sets out four basic beliefs of the traditional African worldview, namely: *wholism*, *spiritism*, *dynamism* and, the one that concerns this chapter, *communalism*. The notion of communalism with regard to possessions is prevalent in traditional African society and stands in contrast to the individualism of the West. This understanding of possessions may be seen in action in squatter communities where the existence of the whole is dependent upon a mere forty percent of the community who are employed. Magesa (1997:68) views the refusal to share as being foreign to African cultural norms and, in fact, destructive. One who refuses to share will be regarded as mean or stingy.

Although this notion is being undermined by the increase of an urban African worldview it is still the major understanding of possessions in the African culture. Mbiti (1980: 821) asserts the same thing.

The church is composed largely of people who come out of the African religious background. Their culture, history, worldviews and spiritual aspirations cannot be taken away from them. These impinge upon their daily life and experience of the Christian faith.

Thus communality is seen to be ingrained in the African mind set. Kwame Bediako states it thus:

African theology argues that there is much continuity in the relationship between Africa's pre-Christian traditional communal religious heritage and its present Christian identity (Bediako 1996:1).

Many communities in the African context would have been deprived of the means of life if this were not the case. Furthermore, it has been my experience that communalism is still active in the parts of Africa that I am involved in.

This notion of communal ownership has a profound affect upon an understanding of possessions. Magesa (1997:277) describes all African organizations as being dependent upon material resources to sustain them. The communality of these resources is essential for that sustenance. African religion:

Emphasizes the communal nature of property within a given community, and, at least to that extent, follows the principle of inclusion (Magesa 1997:277).

Maranz (2001) asks and answers the question, what is the one most fundamental economic consideration in the majority of African societies? He answers: The distribution of economic resources so that all persons may have their minimum needs met, or at least that they may survive (2001:4).

Therefore, the understanding underlying communalism is that all possessions are held in trust and, if needed, may be called upon for the good of the community. This would be a general observation, however, both Van der Walt and Magesa make a case for the holding of personal property in an African traditional context (see Van der Walt 2003:70 and Magesa 1997:277). Magesa particularly states that inclusion does not completely dismiss private or personal ownership. Nkrumah (1967:3) says that, African society was neither classless nor devoid of a social hierarchy. However, the traditional African worldview under-girds the notion of communality and is, in direct contrast to that of the West, essentially communal and concerned with relationships more than possessions. The traditional African worldview made it essential for a person to maintain good relationships, especially in the kinship groups (Moller 1971:68).

That means that the primary concern of the individual would be his place and belongingness in the group. According to African philosophy a person is a person through, with and for the community. Individualism is something new to Africa (see Kasenene in De Gruchy ed. 1994:141). In line with this approach Magesa (1997: 71) gives a description of the basic cosmology of the African worldview stating that it has two spheres to the universe, one visible and the other invisible. These two spheres are interconnected with each influencing the other.

He further points out that the behaviour of human beings is judged in African society by how their actions affect the community and the created order (see Magesa 1997:72). There is, therefore, a direct link between the holding of possessions and belonging to the community. Mbiti (1975:39) declares that it should be emphasized that human beings must be in harmony, not only with animate beings, but also with the entire inanimate creation. This need for belonging to the community, including all the players in the life force of that community, is paramount in African culture. Magesa (2004:94) maintains that the main characteristic of the human person is not individuation but relatedness. His understanding is that the person is supposed to flower into the human, this being its ultimate goal. True humanity is understood as being communal and not individual. The purpose of life, then, is to relate to others in order to form community.

Sharing, communion (in all senses of the words) constitutes the values to define and shape personality (Magesa 2004:94).

It is therefore possible to say that African people have a worldview that could be termed as a “universal oneness”. All things are interconnected in a similar way to the way a spider’s web is interconnected where, when one part is touched, it sets off a vibration in the whole. In the same way, any individual out of sync with the community sets up reactions throughout the community.

Kasenene (1994:140) gives three basic principles that he understands are foundational to African ethics: *communalism, vitalism and holism*. This vitalism refers to the interconnectedness reflected in the understanding of a life force that pervades all of nature. This would include both animate and inanimate things and beings. Within this interconnectedness it is particularly mankind that is the instrument for maintaining oneness (See Magesa 2004:72). Magesa (2004:71) further makes the point that there is one source of life that gives life to all creation. This source would be known by a variety of names in different African cultures and, for our purposes, we may assume that God is being referred to. Within the context of this worldview is an ethical demand that people be sociable, hospitable and open hearted in sharing with the community (See Magesa 1997:62). It is important for the purposes of this thesis that the principle in African society of first the community then the individual be established. This has repercussions in the understanding of possessions in such a society with communal ownership taking precedence over individual property. Balcomb (Science and the African Worldview. 6) quotes Placide Tempels as saying that the concept of separate beings which find themselves side by side, entirely independent one of another, is foreign to Bantu thought. This understanding of relatedness extends to the communal ownership of possessions as being part of the communality of life. Of further interest to this thesis is the concept of trusts as they apply in various forms to

land.

3.4.3. Property held in trust

This would refer to land held in trust under a sovereign or chief that allows the user the means of production and the fruit of that production. Obviously this falls very close to a feudal understanding but it extends beyond that to land owned by the state that is used by an individual or group of individuals. Adams, Sibanda and Turner give an explanation of land rights. Land rights may include:

Rights to occupy a homestead, to use land for annual and perennial crops, to make permanent improvements, to bury the dead, and to have access for gathering fuel, poles, wild fruit, thatching grass, minerals, etc.

Rights to transact, give, mortgage, lease, rent and bequeath areas of exclusive use:

Rights to exclude others from the above listed rights, at community and/or individual levels: and

Linked to the above, rights to enforcement of legal and administrative provisions (1999:2)

Once again, there are similarities between this notion and that held in a traditional African society where the chief is the actual landholder as the trustee of god and the ancestors and the community enjoy the privileges of tenure. Of further importance to notions of property that influence the African church community are those relating to moveable and fixed assets. In this next section I give a very brief explanation of these two.

3.4.3.1. Moveable property (possessions)

This category of possessions takes three forms:

Tangible property: such as motorcars, clothing, animals, goods, money, etc.

Abstract property: such as financial instruments including stocks and bonds etc.

Intellectual property: such as patents, copyrights, trademarks, etc.

3.4.3.2. Fixed property (possessions)

In medieval times the concept of property essentially referred to land. This is most probably still the most common use of the term today, although it would now encompass estate in land, real estate, and other fixed tangible property. In common law property is divided into real property that refers to interests in land and improvements made to the land, and personal property that refers to anything other than real property. Civil law would differentiate between movable and immovable property. Immovable property would correspond to fixed property as described above. (see Wikipedia: 2005 property law).

3.5. Conclusion

These three factors, namely, worldviews, economic systems and systems of ownership, have had a profound impact upon the African church's understanding of a theology of possessions. In the next four chapters I indicate how these factors have significantly influenced African theologians in their approach to possessions.



Chapter Four

From frugality to responsible stewardship: The impact of a missionary ethos

4.1. Introduction

Over a prolonged period of time Western missionaries have been coming to Africa and their influence has been profound. Their understanding of possessions has varied from place to place and from time to time. In this chapter I identify and analyse these different understandings. In order to do so I examine different time slots in the missionary endeavour and indicate the differences in the ongoing missionary approach to possessions and the ownership of material goods.

This approach involves a certain amount of historical material without which it would be impossible to form any opinion. I also rely heavily on the comments of Christian anthropologists who have approached the influence of missionaries from a religious perspective, as well as modern theologians who have written from an African perspective regarding the positive and negative results of missionary work.

The influence of Puritan notions of hard work, resulting in blessing but nevertheless including a concomitant understanding of the need for frugality, played a large role in the early missionary's understanding of possessions and I offer a brief section dealing with this influence. This section describes, analyses, and comments on the influence exercised by the Puritans and pietism.

A further influence on the missionary's understanding of possessions came with an increasing notion of responsible stewardship and I offer a section dealing with the ownership of possessions and the right handling of those possessions under a sense of God's ultimate ownership. Once again I examine the origins of this notion. There is divergence of opinion on the value of these missionary influences and I endeavour to show the extent to which African theologians have been influenced by these notions of the ownership of goods.

Much has been written from an historical perspective regarding the different influences of the missionaries on African culture and this may be followed up in the work of theologians and anthropologists such as Beidelman (1982), Bredenkamp (1995), Ellingsen (1988), Hastings (1966), Isichei (1995), Mbiti (1980), Taylor (1972), et al. The major portion of what has been written is not relevant to this thesis and I have therefore not delved into the detail of these

authors. Instead I have endeavoured to extract their insights on the notion of possessions.

The first area I examine is that of the notion of possessions displayed by the early missionaries.

4.2. The Puritan notion of hard work coupled with frugality

In a chapter entitled “Contradictions in the Sacred and Secular Life” Beidelman (1982) deals with the problems confronting the early missionaries of the Church Mission Society (CMS) in their efforts to establish mission stations in Tanzania. He draws attention to the problem they had of living out a pietistic ascetic lifestyle and yet having so much more than the people they came to minister to. They eschewed any form of worldly pastime as being distractions that drew them from God’s work and they also exhibited a typically frugal lifestyle (by European standards) and refused what would be termed comforts and even intellectualism (see Beidelman 1982:60). Although Beidelman is dealing with mission work in East Africa, it would be reasonable to assume that the same conditions prevailed in other mission societies as prevailed in the CMS and I offer some detail of this as the chapter develops. Some understanding of the narrowness of the approach followed by mission societies may be drawn from an extract from a document in the CMS archives containing instructions to missionaries proceeding to the field dated 1897.

Missionary service should be regarded, not as a profession, but as a vocation. It is to be the one thing of life. Everything else is subsidiary. Rest, change, exercise, and relaxation are, of course, necessary for bodily and mental health, but the faithful missionary will employ these solely as recreation, the better to fit him for his Master’s service. He will watch lest they ever usurp a place to which they have no right. Even the study of nature or art, the love of exploration, the society of fellow countrymen have been to some a very real cause of danger (Beidelman 1982:60).

However, the truth was that the missionaries set themselves apart from and superior to the Africans through their possessions, books, modern articles of hygiene, firearms, shoes, clothing, canned goods, bicycles, compasses and lamps and so on. The way of life under such circumstances that were viewed as frugal by the missionaries was at the same time viewed as living in luxury by the Africans they ministered to.

It should be noted that these missionaries mainly came from a Puritan background, were Calvinistic in their doctrine and were influenced by the pietism of the early seventeenth century (see Cross 1958:1127).

Neill describes how the pietistic movement gave rise to missions supported by the European churches, especially the Moravian missionaries (1964:227, 228). These churches were firmly rooted in pietism. A quote from Chadwick will help to illustrate the basic tenets of pietism:

Though representative of the ascetic world-denying strand of Christianity that in another age issued in monks and friars, they were not ascetic in the old sense of the word. Though frugal and thrifty, they did not share the mediaeval ideal of poverty. A good man worked, and if he worked he might receive prosperity, and he was right to enjoy his prosperity, as he enjoyed other natural gifts like a wife and children. He practiced early rising, days of fasting, temperance at all times, austerity in dress, and he kept few personal comforts in his house. Even a wealthy Puritan might use platters like his poorer tenants. His ideal was to keep his station in society, simply and modestly, and cut away the trivialities and decorations that diverted (Chadwick 1964:182,183).

This influence filtered through most of the Protestant missionary efforts Pakendorf (1993:230) considers their worldview to have been typically conservative, distrustful of the effects of industrialisation, the big city and the spectre of being swamped by the masses. These missionaries were more at home in the rural lifestyle of pre-industrial Europe and reacted against the pomp and vanity of a post- industrial revolution life style that was developing in Europe. However, in spite of their frugality and asceticism there was still a vast dichotomy between the possessions the missionaries portaged in for their daily use and the minimal possessions of the Africans they came to minister to. A brief extract from Wesley's journal sheds light on the Puritan attitude towards possessions that the missionaries espoused:

On Monday evening I gave our brethren a solemn caution not to "love the world, neither the things of the world". This will be their grand danger: as they are industrious and frugal, they must needs increase in goods. This appears already; in London, Bristol and most other trading towns, those who are in business have increased in substance seven-fold, some of them twenty, yea, a hundred-fold. What need, then, have these of the strongest warnings, lest they be entangled therein and perish (Parker undated, 268).

The Puritan policy of hard work and frugality had results that threatened the very fabric of the anti-materialistic emphasis of the early Methodists. While this was the official policy of the mission societies, the reality was that missionaries required vast amounts of equipment simply to survive. Beidelman (1982:63) draws attention to the problem of getting goods from the coast to the mission station. In this section of his book he tells of caravans requiring up to sixty porters. What makes this of relevance to this thesis is the amount of possessions required (over a ton of supplies for each missionary per year) and the impact this amount of necessary equipment had on the African people. The missionaries themselves were very aware of the dangers of materialism even in their, by European standards, deprived situation. When a rebellion all but destroyed the station at Mamboya the missionaries, expressing this negative approach to possessions, felt that it was their excessive interest in material goods and comforts that God was punishing them for by

removing their comforts in this way (see Beidelman 1982:66). Yet, it was the very material and skills of the missionaries that most attracted African people to them. Instructions given to Dr. E and Mrs. Baxter in 1898 (CMS Archives) emphasise this point:

They will watch your house building and gardening etc. etc. and see that you are superior to them in knowledge and energy and are worth listening to therefore on all subjects.

In my reading of the Pear Tree Blossoms I obtained a similar impression of the wonder of local African people (Khoisan, Xhosa etc.) at the expertise of the missionaries, their tools and equipment, rifles and books, and the way in which they managed to reproduce European rural type villages in an African setting. The Moravians particularly produced neat cottages and their stations, still to be seen for example at Genadendal, Mamre and Wupperthal, were like reproductions of Herrnhut (see Kruger 1966, Sales 1975).

One may conclude that the early mission stations that were established by these missionaries reflected their Western origins and the majority of missionaries set about establishing little outposts of home in the midst of African rural settings. My observation would be that, as shall be seen later in this chapter, this tendency to reproduce the home situation was perpetuated in modern missionary endeavours.

The missionaries themselves were driven by an asceticism that must have been a wonder to the local population. Daylight hours were spent in labour, often of a so-called non-spiritual nature such as building, repairing, gardening and hunting. Hard work was seen as a Godly way of life and the missionaries often wore themselves out. This example was at first a wonder and then an example to be followed by the African people. The following extract from the CMS Archives of a letter from Last to Lang dated 22nd May 1882 gives some idea of the rigours of missionary life in that day:

I can honestly say that from 6 o'clock in the morning till 6 p.m. I am busy in mission work and, excepting meal times which seldom occupy half an hour during the day simply resting (doing nothing). The calls of the men working on the station, people coming for medicine, or sores to be done up, others with affairs, which have to be heard, calls here and calls there, then some two or three hours every day with my native teachers besides time taken up in visiting the natives which both Mrs. Last and I attend to as much as possible. For the more we are among them the greater is our influence over them. From 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. I am busy reading and writing, so that in each day, from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. there is but little time which is not actually employed and that directly or indirectly in things for or connected with the mission (CMS Archives May 1882).

So the missionaries, by example, inculcated the Protestant work ethic.⁴ The issue of salaries as it relates to material goods and possessions is also of relevance. Although missionaries did live frugally when measured by European standards, the truth was that their salaries were always many times higher than those of the Africans they employed. Beidelman gives a statistic on the salaries of ordained African clergy being less than a fifteenth of European clergy (Beidelman 1982:68). The impact of this double standard on the African people's assessment of the missionaries, as well as on other non-missionary Europeans, is aptly described by Oliver:

All through (mission) history, the altruism manifest in standards of living had far different effects from those intended. In terms of the average secular European living in East Africa, missionaries lived frugally. Salaries were far less than those of comparably educated Europeans in government or private enterprise; therefore, standards of living were comparably shabbier. Yet the missionaries invariably possessed items of Western technology unavailable to Africans. During the early period this meant guns, metal goods, cloth and medicine; later this included automobiles, houses with cement floors and windows, and innumerable other supposedly essential items. From the African perspective, the supposedly ascetic missionaries lived incomparably better than their black brothers and sisters; yet the modesty and frugality of these missionary's lives appeared seedy and niggardly when compared to other Europeans (Oliver 1952:242).

The interesting conclusion this brought to African thinking was not that the missionaries were thrifty but that they were failed Europeans. Europeans in government or commerce were seen as successful. Protestant missionaries were also compared unfavourably with the Roman Catholic missionaries (Beidelman 1982:68). Beidelman also makes a very telling comment when he says: "The image that Africans sought to emulate involved material success and secular power" (Beidelman 1982:69).

Writing in a Tanzanian context he goes on to say that Africans wanted the missionaries to teach them how to become powerful and prosperous like Europeans. They therefore expected teachers who themselves were powerful and prosperous (see Beidelman 1982:69).

A very different impression is gained when one examines the London Missionary Society's (LMS) work under Van der Kemp at Bethelsdorp. He put the biblical injunction of being all things to all men into practice and adopted the dress, food and lifestyle of the Khoikhoi (Roy 2000:29). Du Plessis (1965: 126) also gives a description of the conditions at Bethelsdorp during Van der Kemp's time:

⁴ Further details regarding missions work in East Africa may be found in Neill, 1964:384 – 388

Van der Kemp levelled himself with the Khoikhoi and adopted their habits of negligence and filth. Bethelsdorp was a wretched situation in which the small, low huts were so wretchedly built, and kept with so little care and attention, that they have a perfectly ruinous appearance.

From the account in Roy (2000:29-30) it would appear that there was very little in the way of goods or material refinements. At a later stage a cottage industry developed through the work of a widow who moved to Bethelsdorp. She brought instruction in sowing, knitting and other practical crafts. The sale of these articles brought in funds for the mission station (Roy 2000:30). At the other end of the scale were the Catholic mission stations that were large by comparison with the Protestant mission stations.

Beidelman (1982:117) speaks of the huge Roman Catholic stations with their own electric plants, lumber mills, furniture shops and stores.

Even under Moffat's ministry an emphasis on possessions became evident. As he stated:

Formerly a chest, a chair, a candle or a table were things unknown, and supposed to be only the superfluous accompaniments of beings of another order; candle moulds and rags for wicks were now in requisition, and tallow carefully preserved, when bunches of candles were shortly to be seen suspended from the wall (Moffat 1969:507,508).

A rather poignant picture is painted of the life of the early missionary George Schmidt who began the work at what was to become Genadendal. His obvious diligence in daily labour and his building of a farm over many years became an inspiration to the "Hottentots" (Khoi?) to become more responsible in their daily lives (see Kruger 1966:26 – 28). A description of his lifestyle given by Kruger is enlightening:

Schmidt did not receive financial support from Herrnhut, but worked for his living after the example of St. Paul, except for occasional gifts from friends at the Cape. For the most part, he drank only water. His garden produced vegetables, fruit, tobacco and even grapes, and his field barley, wheat and oats. He bought six oxen, possibly from his savings. Occasionally, he earned a days living by butchering livestock on neighbouring farms. In short, he made his living like his neighbours on the loan farms (Kruger 1966:27).

The result of the missionary's efforts, besides resulting in converts and spiritual fruit was to heighten the African people's awareness of the differences in material possessions and lifestyle between them and the missionaries. Their requirement that converts adopt Western clothing and live a Western lifestyle placed an emphasis on possessions because of the strain placed on the Africans through the need to acquire the necessary accoutrements for appearing Christian. This confusing of Christianity with Western civilisation is confirmed by a comment on the attitude of the day:

Even Philip and Fairbairn now regarded the enforced civilisation of the Xhosa as a precondition for their conversion to Christianity (Terreblanche 2002:195).

The result was the opening up of the traditional land of the Xhosa to land speculators and farmers and the exploitation of African labour on the pretext of bringing in civilisation (see Terreblanche 2002:195). The gap in understanding between the missionaries and the local people was further evidenced by the quite surprising lack of understanding of the people's need to scrounge for the necessities for survival. The CMS Archives has a letter from Pickthall to Baylis dated 20th November 1909, quoted in Beidelman, where the frustration of the missionaries regarding the African's needs to be involved in trading is spoken of:

In Momboya [sic] there is much to contend with, there's much "going and coming" among the people over teachers as many of them gain their living by selling flour to workmen on the railway, then, cultivating and harvesting are hindrances at other times, also it is difficult to get the same people continuously, and we have to be content with slow progress (Beidelman 1982:118).

This quote gives evidence of a sad lack of ability to understand the life context of the people to whom they were ministering. Fortunately there were those such as Van der Kemp and Schmidt who seem to have had a better rapport with the people. One cannot help but to conclude that the missionaries introduced a focus on material things, albeit inadvertently, that created expectations amongst the local population that the missionaries themselves were at pains not to create. These expectations prepared the way for the inroads made by capitalism and consumerism into African life as the desire for wealth and possessions was increasingly fostered among the African people through the differences in standards between the missionaries, the colonialists and themselves.

As to how this tendency has affected African theologians it must be said that there exists a large body of theologians who still hold the views of the early missionaries regarding Puritan standards of conduct, namely that hard work and frugality are Godly and that Christians are expected to follow this route. This view is expressed by theologians from conservative evangelical backgrounds such as the Baptist seminaries, the evangelical Anglican seminaries, those mission societies coming from the holiness movement and those which could be called faith missions (e.g. the African Evangelical Band, Campus Crusade for Christ and the YWAM movements etc.). Authors such as Nyirongo (1997), Roy (2000), and Van der Walt (2003) are representative of this approach.

4.3. Roman Catholic missionaries from a monastic background

Any examination of the influence of the early missionaries on the notion of possessions in an

African context would be incomplete without at least some brief observations concerning the early Roman Catholic missionaries and their mission stations. Beetham refers to the gospel being preached through Roman Catholic priests who accompanied expeditions from Portugal, serving as chaplains to the new trading settlements:

By 1500 the gospel had been preached at the courts of Benin and Congo; a son of the king of Congo was elevated to a bishopric in 1518 (Beetham 1967:8).

The church's approach to missions in Natal under Trappist monks is further indicative of the attitude of the church toward missions. Bishop Ricards expressed it in the following way:

The missionaries would bring the advantages of material civilisation and so obtain more easily a hearing for their religion, and at the same time would have the means of subsistence for themselves (Brown, 1960:104).

One of the main differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant missions was the way in which African priests were well educated under the Roman Catholic system and poorly educated under the Protestant system. The importance of this distinction is that African religious leaders operate as role models for Africans. The educated Roman Catholic African clergy adopted a European lifestyle in dress, mannerisms, transportation and furnishings. The payment of these clergy was more than those of the Protestant local clergy and the result was that their lifestyle contrasted quite drastically with that of the Protestant African clergy. As is commented on by Beidelman, this contrast resulted in impressions being made on Africans as they observed the differences.

African Protestant pastors are poorly paid and must cultivate the soil to make ends meet (quoting Johnson 1977:19, 64; Strayer 1978:24-78). They lack modern furnishings, everyday shoes, and stylish clothing. This contributes a note of Christian simplicity consistent with deeply ingrained Protestant visions of self-abnegating, pietistic Christians, but for most Africans conversion to Christianity is associated with securing access to modern skills and superior social status, rather than with developing homely virtues defined by dour, atavistic missionaries (Beidelman 1982:12).

The Roman Catholic mission stations expressed the wealth of royal patronage and also introduced a focus on possessions to the African continent. Dinwiddy has a comment that is of significance here:

Fr. Patrick Ryan distinguished himself by throwing handfuls of pennies to the curious Igbo crowd that gathered at his arrival (quoted by Fasshole-luke 1978:428).

A further quote from the above expresses the reaction to the missionaries:

Speaking of professing one thing hypocritically in the open and sincerely practicing the other in secret for fear of the epithet “uncivilized” being applied to them (Fasshole-luke 1978:430).

These quotes emphasise the mercenary motivation behind much of the attendance by African people at the mission stations.

In summary, both Protestants and Roman Catholics arrived with the mass of accoutrements they considered necessary, proceeded to build replicas of European life and created a contrast between their possessions and the lack of possessions of the African peoples they ministered to.

This whole approach to possessions had its roots in two different soils for the Protestant and Catholic missionaries. As the Catholic missionaries were really the first to enter Africa (Beetham 1967:7+8, Roy 2000:54) it will be necessary to examine their roots in monasticism. The earliest contact between Ghana and Christian missionaries was in the late 15th century when Roman Catholic missionaries accompanied the earliest Portuguese traders to the gold coast (Amanor 2006:1).

Some insight into the ascetic background of the different societies that came into the African field will set the stage for better understanding their influence. Different orders were involved in establishing missions in different parts of Africa. Jesuits established a monastery in the Congo in the mid 16th century, Trappist monks were invited to South Africa in the 19th century, and a host of different orders entered the continent. Roy (2000:55) lists the following: Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinian sisters, Marist brothers and Trappists. Each of these orders derived from the time of the formation of the monasteries and carried the mark of asceticism.

Franciscans: the rule of the order, known as the “regula bullata”, had as its distinguishing mark an insistence on complete poverty, not only for the friars, but for the whole order as well.

The friars were to live by the work of their hands or, by begging, but were forbidden to own any property or to accept money (Cross 1958: 523).

However, the order later acquired property and grew in prosperity. The article by Cross is informative and detailed for further information on this order.

Dominicans: As with the Franciscans, St. Dominic decided that the order should practice not merely individual but corporate poverty.

That it should have no possessions except its actual houses and churches, and live by begging (Cross 1958:413).

Jesuits: These soldiers of the church took the normal three vows of the monastic orders, poverty being one of them (Cross 1958:722).

Augustinians of the Assumption: This monastic order followed the Augustinian rule of poverty, celibacy and obedience (Cross 1958:97).

Marist Brothers: These also followed the Jesuit order (Cross 1958:858).

Trappists: Better known as Cistercians these monks devoted themselves to the liturgy, absolute silence with no allowance for recreation and community life, not residing in cells but having a common dormitory. They devoted themselves to manual, especially agricultural, labour and to theological studies but not to parish work (see Cross 1958:1372).

As may be seen from the extremely brief description above, the background for most of the Roman Catholic missionaries was to deny personal possessions according to the vows of the monastic orders. However, most of the orders established mission stations that had strong buildings and possessed enormous resources in the form of equipment and facilities (Roy 2000:54 – 56).

4.4. The Puritan and pietistic roots of Protestant missionaries

Pietism was a movement birthed by Phillip Spener in the Lutheran church with the purpose of bringing new life into the official Protestantism of his day (Cross 1958:1071, also African Christian Homepage; Pre-colonial Protestant Missions: 1700-1890: 2005). In South Africa more than a quarter of the mission stations in the 19th century belonged to German societies (Japhta et al 1993:22). The influence of pietism on the Puritans and vice versa may be seen in the common ground they held regarding the form of church meetings and an emphasis on experiential holiness (see Cross 1958:1071, cf. 1127, also articles in Moyer 1951 [2 volumes]). Moyer mentions this influence:

Early in his life Spener read several books on English Puritanism (Moyer 1951: 402). Puritanism was very much to England what pietism was to become to Germany (Moyer 1951:402).

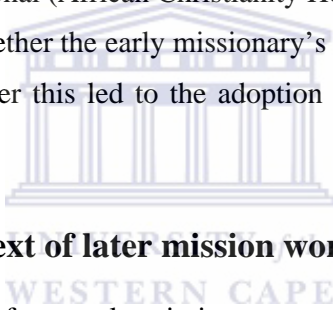
It was from this foundation that the Moravian missionary movement began, and this foundation in pietism and Puritanism is of significance for this thesis as has already been noted above (see Amanor 2006:2 for information on pietism). The Puritan movement may be seen as a reaction against the Elizabethan finery of the day and they sought to bring an austerity into daily life that included frugality regarding possessions (Chadwick 1964:176). The influence of Puritanism on the missionaries, particularly those of the London Missionary Society and the Church Missionary Society, was significant and has been referred to above in references to the two mission societies. In this period it was the Moravian/German missionaries who had the greatest impact on the

southern part of Africa, bringing with them the pietism of Herrnhut and a predilection to frugality and austere living. This influenced the mission stations they developed and the converts they made in the way they approached possessions.

The significance of the above pointers may be seen in the European missionary movement that was birthed out of the zeal of European communitarian pietists and austere English Puritans who scattered throughout the world, including Africa, to spread the Gospel (African Christianity Homepage 2005: Pre-colonial Protestant Missions: 1700-1890). The majority of these missionaries were from working class backgrounds, especially those from the Baptist missionary society and the London missionary society (Pakendorf 1993:229). The following quote emphasises this commonality:

These early missionaries shared a number of common characteristics. In addition to most of them being from working class backgrounds they were otherworldly in their social and political orientation, individualistic in their views of salvation and society and firmly non-denominational (African Christianity Homepage 2005).

In this next section I examine whether the early missionary's need of possessions was perpetuated in later mission work and whether this led to the adoption of capitalistic values in the African churches.



4.5. Possessions in the context of later mission work

In this section I cover the period from early missions to modern missions, namely from 1900 to 2000. In the next section I offer some comments on missions and possessions in this millennium. A quote from Beidelman regarding the attitude of African people towards the missionaries in this period may serve here as an introductory comment:

From their arrival it was clear to the CMS that the Kaguru sought contact in order to gain access to European goods and skills and that displays of material benefits served as powerful magnets to attract potential converts (Beidelman 1982:117).

Once again the influence of goods and possessions held by the missionaries is clearly portrayed. Mission stations became to rural Africans what cities would become to rural people in the period of urbanisation now being experienced in Africa.

As the work of the missions expanded missionaries found themselves supervising things such as construction work, with the resultant loss of time spent in preaching and teaching. The Rev. David Deekes complains that he built five houses and several churches during his career (quoted in Beidelman 1982:117). This preoccupation with material possessions continued. A rather lengthy quote from Beidelman provides an indication of this preoccupation and the reaction of

the missionaries to it.

They are indeed, at any rate most of them, the veriest mendicants one could well meet with. I find it best to laugh at their begging propensities, telling them they ought to be ashamed to beg from a poor man like myself, when they have all their flocks and herds. Happily, the Dr. has all the cloth in his own charge, so that I am able to tell them that I have nothing to give them. They then point to my boots and hat as evidence that I must be a rich man. I tell them I have riches, but they are in heaven, and I have come to show them the way to that happy place. Sometime after, asking if they have understood me, they reply, “Yes, give me some cloth, bwana” (1982:118 quoted from the CMS Archives).

Wagner (1972:119) has a telling comment on the way missionaries arrived that helps to explain why there continued to be this disparity between the locals and the missionaries:

The missionary arrived equipped the way the sending church wants to send him, not necessarily the way the receiving church wants him to serve

As colonial rule came to an end, the employees at CMS mission stations were forbidden to be involved in secular business and were told to devote themselves to the preaching of the gospel. This made them dependent on home support and many experienced hardship. The white missionaries were used to experiencing lack but the mission now expected their African employees to evidence the same renunciation. This renunciation was against the expectations that had been engendered in the African converts through their observation of the missionaries and their status.

Unfortunately (in terms of mission ideals), the advantages of education and medical treatment appear secondary to the final goal of improved material life (Beidelman 1982:119).

The period from 1900 to 2000 saw extraordinary growth and diversification in the African church (Roy 2000:3). A number of factors are significant for the purposes of this thesis. The first was the beginning and ongoing growth of the Pentecostal movement and the later development of the Charismatic movement. Missions that developed out of these movements, which had very definite roots in the holiness movement, tended to move in two different directions. The one approach was essentially pietist and the other essentially socialist.

Radical Evangelicals (those who accepted the social implications of the Christian message) present a far more socially aware perspective and are inclined to condemn and bypass existing Western systems in order to focus on what they consider to be biblical approaches to the economy, the poor and the church’s attitude to social evil (see Ellingsen 1988:278). The biblical understanding of, “If one member suffers all members suffer together” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

holds prominence in their thinking. Their attitude to the use of resources would reflect a strong understanding of mutual responsibility and stewardship in order that there not be lack among the Christians.

However, conservative evangelicals (those who are more focussed on the spiritual aspects of the Christian message) comprise the largest sector of the evangelical church and could be seen as most in line with an historical Evangelical approach. This section of the church is representative of the majority of missionaries from evangelical societies operating in Africa and would have a predominantly pietistic approach. The relevant elements as far as this thesis is concerned are the disregard for social factors and material needs which characterises this section of Evangelicals. There is a comment on the flyleaf of Ortlund's book (*Let the Church be the Church*) which is informative in what he leaves out when expressing what he considers the reason for God creating the church, and also gives insight into the viewpoint of this sector:

The Church's chief function, as also the individual believer's chief function, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. He, Himself, must be the Churches first priority. With that priority firmly established, the other priorities for the church fall into place. The second priority is the body of Christ: building up one another in love. And the third priority is the world outside the church: reaching out to unbelievers and winning them to Christ (Ortlund 1983: flyleaf).

The significance of this quotation is that on examining the section in his book dealing with the church and the world, I found no mention of any social responsibility, almost as if there were two separate worlds that did not touch on each other. For these conservative evangelicals possessions and wealth would be unimportant peripheral issues in which they would accept that God's will was paramount and the having or not of wealth and possessions being conditions to simply be accepted.

In spite of the lack of concern of the missionaries with the material issues of life, as was the case in some of the earlier missionaries, the growing focus among African Christians was very different. Neill puts it aptly in his chapter dealing with the growth of mission work in Africa in the 20th Century:

Throughout Africa, the parents in the church are for the most part converts of the first generation who have only recently emerged from the primitive life of the African tribe; their children are at home in the modern world of telephones and racing cars (Neill 1964:503).

Neill's position is that, for many Africans, Christianity belongs to the childhood of the individual, almost at Sunday school level. He makes a comment on the understanding that the future belongs to the mature person:

Who is able to understand it in terms of material progress and advancement, and needs no fitful and uncertain ray from heaven to guide him on an already well-lighted and very earthly way (Neill 1964:503).

Neill holds the view that the most dangerous force competing for the soul of Africa is materialism. Once again the difference in understanding between the conservative evangelicals and African aspirations stands out as profound. The disparity in possessions between the missionaries and the African people continued to be a cause of envy and created a value system based upon possessions. At one point the missionaries had moved from paying for work done in goods such as cloth and implements and they then began paying in cash. This was not well received by the African agents and workers as it cuts across the established barter system. They preferred to be paid in goods because the barter system was still strong in the rural areas. There was also unhappiness because the missions generally paid less to their workers than in the case of secular employees in comparable positions. Beidelman offers an interesting comment on the attitude of the CMS towards payment.

Converts repeatedly asked why they should not be paid more than pagans; ironically, the CMS thought that the reverse should be true and that converts should be willing to give some labour out of love for God. Throughout its stay in Ukaguru, the CMS expected mission employees to work for less pay than those comparably employed outside the church (Beidelman 1982:168).

While there was a difference in approach to possessions between the early Catholic and puritan missionaries, the result was similar in that they both came from a culture which had become industrialised and enjoyed a level of possessions which made them appear wealthy by African standards. A similar result resulted from the Conservative Evangelical missionaries who underplayed the value of possessions yet accumulated goods that they regarded as necessary resulting in their lifestyle being far above that of the African people they ministered to. One can appreciate how all these situations led to a growing focus on material possessions and highlighted the disparity between the missionaries and the African converts in the church.

4.6. Pentecostal perspectives on possessions as a blessing of God

In the twentieth century a major influence on the understanding of possessions in the African church was the development of Pentecostal churches and the rise, in the latter half of the century, of the prosperity movement.

A brief examination of the development of the prosperity movement's emphasis on material possessions is pertinent at this point, however, I give a more detailed examination of this section of the African church in a later chapter. It is difficult to do more than generalise regarding the

development of the Pentecostal churches in Africa as it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the many streams that this grouping consists of. I therefore trace the roots of this part of the evangelical church and then examine the influence of Western capitalism on the Pentecostal church's approach to possessions. Isichei (1995:334) points out that the real proliferation of Pentecostal churches on the African continent began in the 1980's (Isichei 1995:335, Amanor 2006:9 & 14). Of significance for this thesis is her comment that the new churches bear the imprint of a particular complex of ideas originating in America (1995:335). These ideas included an increasing emphasis on the blessing of God being expressed through possessions. While the roots of Pentecostalism lie in a poor setting in Asuza Street in Los Angeles, the movement went on to give birth to the prosperity gospel through proponents such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland (see Hagin, 1981 & Copeland 1978). This development is of particular relevance to the church in Africa and its understanding of possessions. The move into prosperity teaching occurred in the early 1970s and it would appear to be an aligning of the gospel with the American dream. Some quotes from Copeland and Hagin regarding riches might be helpful in this regard:

God's covenant is a covenant of prosperity. His covenant causes prosperity to be manifested in the earth. Psalm 37:27 tells us that God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His people. He cannot establish His covenant in your life without prospering you (Copeland 1978:16).

Some people seem to have the idea that if a person is a Christian, a believer of God, it is a mark of humility, a mark of godliness, for him to be poor and in poverty, and not have anything (Hagin 1966:4).

This understanding exhibits an extreme form of equating God's blessing with the accumulation of riches and has become the subject of much preaching in African Pentecostal churches. Once again one finds an emphasis on the possession of material goods that indicate the blessing of God on one's life. The notion of double honour has a long history in American Pentecostal circles: the idea being that more of the available wealth should be apportioned to Christian leaders than to their followers by virtue of their leadership (Walker 1985:81). The impact of this teaching on the Pentecostal/charismatic church in Africa is of particular importance as pastors are expected to be an example of this type of blessing in order for their disciples to emulate them. When one realises that in 2000 there were 83 million Christians in independent churches and 126 million Pentecostal/charismatic Christians in Africa (Meyer 2004:451), then the influence of such views in Western Pentecostal churches is bound to have a profound effect upon churches in an African context. Most of these churches were founded and organised around the personality of a charismatic African leader and remained institutionally independent from, though they had strong

links to, Western Pentecostal churches (Meyer 2004:452). This is in stark contrast to the Catholic vows of poverty and the puritan lifestyle of frugality in that it caters for the desire for possessions created by the disparity between the possessions of the early missionaries and the local people. Meyer speaks of a “millennial capitalism” as a factor in PCCs (Pentecostal Charismatic Churches) and then goes on to quote from various authors in support of this statement. From an African perspective, much is made of possessions. Meyer’s comment regarding prosperity teaching is significant:

What is distinctly new about PCCs is their preaching of the Prosperity Gospel and their strong global inclination (Meyer 2004:453).

The comments made by Meyer (2004:459) in expanding on “millennial capitalism” are relevant:

Many PCCs present themselves as ultimate embodiments of modernity. Building huge churches to accommodate thousands of believers, making use of elaborate technology to organize mass-scale sermons and appearances on TV and radio, setting up spectacular crusades throughout the country, often parading foreign speakers so as to convert nominal Christians, Moslems and supporters of traditional religions, creating possibilities for high quality Gospel Music, and instigating trend setting modes of dress all create an image of successful mastery of the modern world.

The result of this trend has been to create an emphasis on the possession of good clothes and material possessions as signs of God’s blessing. Commenting on the nature of the prosperity gospel Asamoah-Gyadu says:

The gospel of prosperity, simply put, is the theological position that through the death and resurrection of Christ, God has made available to the believer all the riches of this world (2005:4)

Preaching from Psalm 103, Pastor Mensa Otobil submitted that the psalmist acknowledges God as the one who fills my mouth with good things. You need money to secure the good things of life, so do not stop making demands on God until your mouth is filled with good things. Basically, the pastor sets the tone. This is in stark contrast with the Puritan/ pietistic attitude that possessions belong to God and need to be handled carefully as that which God has entrusted to good stewards. Max Weber has commented on the conduct of early Protestantism but the strong emphasis on becoming prosperous and showing off wealth distinguishes Pentecostal churches from early Protestantism. (see chapter 2:6 above).

4.7. African Independent Churches (AICs) and possessions

In a number of places in Africa there were breakaway movements from the established churches. Quite often they were begun by a prophetic figure that introduced a far more charismatic type of Christianity to the African church such as William Wade Harris and Sampson Opong in Ghana

(Amanor 2006: 12 & 14), Elias Mahlangu and Alexander Dowie in South Africa (Roy 2000:113 – 122) and many others. The separatist churches fall into the category just described above and they typically separated from the established churches because of the denial of any validity in African Traditional Religion. They represent a reaction against materialism and shallow religiosity; against cultural passivity and consumerism and against a religion that is purely internal, inward looking and oblivious to community (Amanor 2006:2).

This may be seen in the way the Faith Tabernacle Church in Ghana had a rule that there should be no emphasis on the acquisition of property (Amanor 2006:17).⁵ Again, I will examine the contribution made by the AICs to a theology of possessions in more detail in another chapter.

In order to complete this chapter I need to examine the modern missionary and the modern mission station. I will then examine the developing of entrepreneurship among African converts.

4.8. Modern missions: The perpetuation of disparity

In beginning this section I introduce two examples of present day disparity in the use of possessions in a mission context. The first concerns my spending a night at a mission station compound. I shall refrain from naming the mission society for the sake of tact. I found a part of the missionaries' home country located in a town that was very African. There was a high wall around the compound and the gates were made of steel plate. In this enclosure the home country life style was perpetuated. To my surprise we were warned not to go out of our building after 22h00 because they then let the dogs out. This country is particularly peaceful and I felt that these missionaries had unnecessary fears about their safety. The second account concerns a missionary from Kenya whose wife is the daughter of an African missionary. I listened to her tell me, with pain in her voice, that when she was little her father had been on a mission station in Kenya along with a white missionary from a Western country. As she recounted the circumstances she spoke of the white missionary having a large house with a pick up truck. Her father, who because of circumstances, ended up with eight children to educate, lived in a small house and had to ride a bicycle. Her comment was that they were both missionaries in the same mission society. Her father had to visit the outstations on his bicycle and then do a report for the white missionary who would then send it back to headquarters. The further disparity she revealed was that the mission society ran the best school in the area but made no effort to send any of them to the school or even to assist her father in doing so (personal experiences and interview with Mrs. Musembi).

⁵ For more detail on AICs see Gerdener 1958 chapter 4, Hastings 1979: sections on "independence".

These examples indicate the perpetuation of a Western understanding of possessions in which what is mine is mine and I am free to use and to decide what I will do with what is mine. This indicates individuality as opposed to communality and the need to protect what is mine.

I cite these two occasions in order to demonstrate that the disparity between foreign Western missionaries and the majority of the African church is still profound. The missionaries tend to drive new vehicles, use notebooks and data projectors and generally display no lack of resources.

This disparity in possessions still reflects the situation found when the earliest missionaries came to Africa (see 4.2 above). One area of consequence is that of financial control, an area fraught with resentment in the African church. At the Green Lake '71 study conference on missions George Peters, one of the delegates, said:

The disparity of income and the ability of missions and missionaries to initiate projects, which the national church has no hopes to carry on without financial subsidies, have assured either the permanency of the mission or the paralysis of the program as soon as the mission or missionary leaves (Wagner 1972:122).

The ongoing economic disparity between African nations and the industrial West is seen in the resources available to the West and the lack of resources in Africa. Wagner confirms this conclusion:

Even the most pitiable, poverty-stricken new missionary appears quite wealthy to the national Christian of most mission lands (1972:145).

The availability of mass media and the different standards of living evidenced in Western and African lives, the picture that is seen daily by Africans as they observe Westerners and tourists from other nations, the evidence of magazines, films and television which is open to people in Africa, often in village situations, the standards that are possible in the world of which they also are citizens has highlighted this difference. The constant visual comparisons inevitably create dissatisfaction with the ways of the fathers. The most effective missionary in Africa today could quite easily be judged to be Trinity Broadcasting Network. This network beams Christian programmes into Africa, very often on a twenty-four hour basis. The message visually depicts an American style of Christianity and Christian lifestyle.

The quote from Meyer, comments on the image portrayed by the charismatic leaders of the Pentecostal/ charismatic churches. She also comments further on the image:

The flamboyant leaders of the new mega-churches, who dress in the latest (African) fashion, drive nothing less than a Mercedes Benz, participate in the global Pentecostal jet-set, broadcast the message through flashy TV and radio programs and preach the prosperity gospel to their deprived and hitherto-hopeless born-again followers at home and in the Diaspora (2004:448).

As I mentioned above (4.3.1.) the Pentecostal churches outnumber the number of African Independent churches and this growth may be attributed to the extensive exposure gained by the Pentecostal/charismatic churches through the mass media. My observation of the broadcasts on Trinity Broadcasting Network concludes that most of the evangelical mainline churches (Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian), as well as the charismatic churches, are given reasonable exposure, but by far the greater majority of programmes portray an American Tele-evangelist style of service with much glitter and evident signs of wealth and possessions. An observation by Meyer bears this conclusion out:

PCCs and their intensive links to trans-national circuits, in particular to American tele-evangelists, and their enthusiastic drive to proselytise non believers....” (2004:448).

This has had a major impact on the expectations of African people and also on the expectations of the church and is more fully explored in chapter eight. The impact of this theology upon a theology of possessions in the African church cannot be stressed sufficiently!

The African husband asks now for tap-borne water to save the weary miles to the river or the well, and then raises his sights, and his wife’s hopes, to the electric stove in place of the head loading and chopping of firewood. And why should not the electric washer be just round the corner for his home too (Beetham 1967:67)?

4.9. Conclusion

This capitalist input has impacted the ethos of the African church as it struggles to rise above the legacy of colonialism. These struggles reflect the diverse nature of the many different missionary streams and the spectrum of positions that have resulted. All along a disparity has existed between the missionaries and the people they came to minister to. It may be noted that the width of this spectrum is evidenced in the difference between the approach of Baptist missionaries and New Pentecostal missionaries to an understanding of possessions. Wagner offers a significant comment regarding the disparity between missionaries and the local population:

In general, American missions are a very elaborate end product of a massive century and a half of institutional development. The early missionaries were generally poor people who went from a poor country. But it did not take them long to build up institutions and vast land holdings – in some cases, little empires – and in all cases a vast array of paraphernalia unimaginably beyond the ability of the national churches to duplicate (Wagner 1972:144).

The conclusions drawn by the content of this chapter have not been particularly comfortable for me. The realisation that the response to missionary endeavour of the last two centuries has been largely driven by the desire to progress and accumulate goods in one way or another, be it by gaining education or by adopting Western methods of business or by becoming involved in the

business of the church, has caused me to reflect on the stories of great success I was brought up on. Having been brought up on missionary literature and stories of missionaries who laid down their lives I had a rosy picture of what mission work was all about. I had never been exposed to African authors writing about missions from an African perspective. I had an awareness of the denigration of African traditional culture by the missionaries as well as the demonising of African traditional religion, but had no realisation of the view expressed by many of the African authors I consulted. The discovery of the Western enculturation of the African church has been enlightening and I find my sympathies tending more and more towards the understanding that the Western church has robbed the African church of much that would have been good. The worst impact has been the influence of materialism caused by the disparity between the missionaries and the African people. My personal experiences with regard to the pain amongst African church leaders have made me extremely sensitive to the sort of disparities I have had to examine. The psychological impact of this disparity upon the African church has had incalculable effects. The development of a master/servant mentality has been particularly demeaning. The next quote details very succinctly that which happens when riches and poverty meet:

Whenever generosity of giving, teaching, and helping is of an unconditional character, the recipient must be able to return the gift of some equivalent in order to remain his own respectable self. Otherwise he will begin seeing himself as inferior to the giver; his personal sense of worth is down graded and instead of being grateful he will be bitter. This set of forces is very much misunderstood in many mission programs today (Wagner 1972:210).

My conclusion is that the missionaries have, inadvertently, promoted a Western lifestyle, technology and consumption of resources that has infected the African church with a huge dose of materialism. This has largely been as a consequence of an understanding among Westerners that many possessions indicate the blessing of God. Colonialism has also caused a major problem as a result of the incipient materialism deposited. Sundkler remarks on this problem:

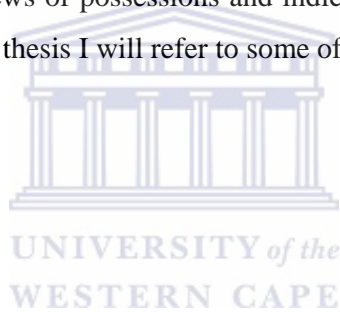
In the past it was racial inequality that pre-occupied the people in Africa, because it created different classes of citizens. This problem is slowly being solved, but already a new problem comes to the fore; inequality in wealth. For in many African countries modern elites are emerging which take to themselves many of the privileges formerly held by European colonials. Consequently, the rich still exploit the poor, and human dignity is far from being universally guaranteed (Fashole-luke 1978:575).

Sundkler then asks the question whether monasticism knows an answer to this problem. Racialism has been addressed but there is still very little understanding of the problem raised by inequality in wealth and the possible solutions from a Christian perspective. A further conclusion I would come to is that there is a disparity between the poverty of the Catholic religious and the

parish or mission facilities they have available to them. There is also still a vast disparity between the established Catholic missions and the circumstances of most of their adherents. I would also observe that the disparity in Protestant missionary circles (and probably the same could be said for the Protestant churches) and the people ministered to would extend to the living standards of the missionaries as much as to the mission stations.

As a final comment, I would be remiss if I made no reference to the many missionaries I have personally encountered who are sacrificially serving in medical and other missions under difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, even they have vehicles and equipment, appliances and resources that are foreign to the people at the receiving end of their ministries.

In summary, the development of a possession conscious church is as much a factor in the growth of materialism in Africa as is an invasive capitalism on the economic front. Theologians such as Amanor, Fashole-luke, Meyer, Nyirongo, Pakendorf, Roy and Sundkler express an awareness of the inroads made by Western views of possessions and indicate the damages done by this trend. In the penultimate chapter of this thesis I will refer to some of their conclusions.





Chapter 5

Inculturation and a theology of possessions

5.1. Introduction

One of the dominant schools in African theology uses the notion of inculturation as its point of departure. While this is mainly the purview of Roman Catholic theologians, there are a number of Anglican scholars who have made significant contributions to this form of theology. I do not examine these authors as that is beyond the scope of this thesis. A list of some of these scholars is

offered in a footnote.⁶

In all these contributions an attempt is made to retrieve aspects of African village life that have been threatened or destroyed by imperialism, colonialism, slavery, globalism, capitalism and urbanisation.

I do not offer any in depth study of inculturation here. Neither do I offer an examination of the hermeneutics, methodology or theological stance of these theologians. In this chapter I examine the contribution of four theologians who write on inculturation and then attempt to analyse and categorise them from the perspective of a theology of possessions.

The following is a brief description of inculturation from two theologians:

Reiser defines inculturation as “the process of a deep, sympathetic adaptation to and appropriation of a local culture in which the church finds itself, in a way that does not compromise its faith” (Cornille 1992 ix).

Waliggo (1986:43) defines inculturation in the following way:

The inculturation of the church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that this not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment of the church universal.

Both these definitions could be the subject of a separate examination but that would be beyond the scope of this thesis and I therefore simply offer them as two different descriptions of inculturation.

As the notion of possessions is not the main consideration of these theologians it has been necessary for me to spread the net quite broadly in order to develop a notion of possessions in the context of inculturation theologies. To this end I examine the works of Benezet Bujo, Laurenti Magesa, John Mbiti, and Aylward Shorter.

5.2. Emphases in an inculturation approach to African Theology

The African Independent Churches have re-emphasised the corporate nature of life and the communality of Christianity as a concomitant to African communality. The parallel is drawn between African co-responsibility and the communal use of possessions and the teaching of the early church regarding the use and stewardship of possessions. It is this sense of community that

⁶ See Appiah-Kubi K (1979), Appiah SK (2001), Bujo B (1990), Ela J-M (1990), Isizoh CD (2005), Magesa L (2004), Mbiti J (1980), Mugambi JKN (1998), Sarpong PK (1982), Skhakhane J (2000), Waliggo JM (1986).

is the main thrust of the argument put forward by the theologians involved in the inculturation debate. I have found this to be a recurring theme in a variety of approaches. I introduce Benezet Bujo last in this chapter as his is a quite different approach, recognising the responsibility of the individual with regard to possessions in African culture much more so than does Magesa.

a) Laurenti Magesa is one of Africa's best-known Catholic theologians. As do many African theologians, Magesa follows the process of inculturation from the days of the formation of Israel, through the Patristic period and up to present day Africa. He quotes Pope Paul VI as saying that:

The goal of the church's mission remains to incarnate the word of God in particular places, among given peoples, at particular times, through the generous sharing of the evangelisers life of faith (Magesa 2004:162).

This is typically a description of the meeting between faith and culture expressed by the Catholic Church. In a section dealing with the "African Palaver" Magesa writes regarding community:

The determining principle is the life of the community together with its constituent parts; in African moral anthropology it (the community) is the key of human existence (Magesa 2004:178).

The subject of African communality is a recurring theme, although not all African theologians regard it as a simple phenomenon. Commenting on the community of goods Magesa says that in Africa, organisations, whether social or political, presuppose the existence of material resources to sustain them. Decisions about the use of material resources usually depend on the moral values of the community, its expectations for co-operation and sharing, and its understandings of law and order (see Magesa 1997:277).

Magesa does, however, contrast the African notion of the worth of the individual being intimately linked to belonging to the community or clan, with the gospel value of the individual as being created in the image of God, thereby minimising the argument of African traditional religion and culture (see Magesa 2004:214).

b) John Mbiti is an Anglican theologian who is widely respected for his contribution to African Christian theology. His commitment to seeing African culture incorporated into the African church is obvious throughout his writings. He is passionate about discovering ways in which African traditional religion and Christianity can legitimately be integrated. His approach to African traditional religion and its integration into the culture of the African church makes him significant as his approach incorporates the use of possessions:

In the minds of some people it (Christianity) is still associated with Europe and America, since it was from there that the majority of the missionaries came. But it must be borne in mind that Christianity is not a European or American religion. It

came to Africa before it reached Europe; and it was already in Africa long before European and American missionaries began to preach it in other parts of the continent. A day will come, also, when African Christians will take new forms of Christianity to Europe and America to refresh or revive Christianity in those areas (Mbiti 1975:184).

The context of the above quote is his insistence that the church in the West needs to develop a new understanding of the communality of the Christian life and that this can come from the African church as it reintroduces understandings of the connectedness of all life to the Western church. The above quote echoes the findings of this thesis thus far regarding the individualistic attitudes of missionaries who come from Western cultures.

c) Aylward Shorter is another Catholic theologian who has done much work in this area and I include him in this brief survey. He describes inculturation as the process by which a person is inserted into his or her culture (Shorter 1988:5). He comments on the cultural change that comes about from the encounter between different cultures and how they affect each other. The impression he has is that, thus far, the problem in an African context has been that the exchange is, to a large extent, a one sided one. The following quote throws light on the importance Shorter (1988:7) attaches to inculturation: “Human beings possess the collective freedom to modify their particular cultural traditions through contact with people of other cultures”.

Once again Shorter presumes that a mutual influence has occurred that is denied by some theologians such as Mbiti. Mbiti sees this influence as being almost totally from the Western side with very little influence being exerted from the African side. That this mutual influence is needed is beyond question. Commenting on the speech given by the Pope in Nairobi in 1985 Shorter says:

Among the pastoral tasks requiring the assistance of theologians were the strengthening of spiritual life, the consolidation of the family and the building of small Christian communities. Under the supervision of the bishops, there was to be an active dialogue between faith and culture (Shorter 1988:234).

This dialogue between faith and culture is the essence of inculturation. The stress on small communities reflects recognition of the importance of the family and the mutual help given in all areas of life in such a setting. Shorter considers the development of such small communities as being the obvious way to bring about a greater sharing of possessions.

d) Benezet Bujo, another Catholic theologian, expresses deep concern at the monoculture that is emerging through modern technology (Bujo 2003:11). This is the background against which he pursues his investigation of African ethics. He is troubled over the mass media’s assumption that what is good for Europe and North America must be equally good everywhere and for all cultures

(Bujo 2003:12). This so-called democratic culture effectively destroys the world that Africans have traditionally lived in. Bujo understands communitarian life to be of the essence of African political life and that central to this was the palaver (indaba). He then proceeds to deal with the problem of inculturation with regard to evangelisation, agreeing with the need for the gospel to grow within the soil of any culture and develop into its own expression of Christianity. He calls for the gospel to make its home among every people, without identifying itself with one specific culture, not even a global or monoculture (Bujo 2003:12). A quote he makes from Suso Brechter expresses the influence of Western culture on the church's evangelisation:

It is a depressing historical fact that, apart from in the West and in the new world, the church was no longer able to incorporate any new foreign culture into herself and transform it. It never again became truly at home anywhere, but remained Western wherever she was (Bujo 2003:13).

Bujo represents a sector of theology that takes inculturation seriously without denying the areas of African traditional religion that are incompatible with Christianity. As he is an ethical theologian, he is particularly relevant to the subject of possessions.

A common thread running through these theologians is the need to return to community and accept the communal ownership of possessions, and the possibility of this being a good place of meeting between African Traditional Religion and Western Christianity. It is without doubt this aspect of inculturation that is relevant. I now examine each of the above authors separately in order to, a) derive how their understanding of inculturation affects the retrieval of community and family life and how this impacts upon private ownership and stewardship of possessions and, b) attempt to bring these understandings together in order to gain a broad perception of how inculturation affects a theology of possessions.

5.3. Laurenti Magesa

Magesa is a Catholic theologian currently working as a parish priest in Tanzania. His book, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* examines African Religion from a Roman Catholic perspective, and also from an inculturation perspective. In a similar way to Mbiti he emphasizes the communality of African life:

One cannot ensure the full enhancement of life by oneself. One's life force depends on the life sources of other persons and other beings, including those of the ancestors and, ultimately, God (Magesa 1997:52).

Some of the things he lists (among others) as being contained in the African view of the universe include the sense of family, community, solidarity and participation. In this he echoes the call of most African theologians for a return to the values held dear in African traditional culture. In the

following quote Magesa (1997:53) expresses this longing. He is writing in the context of the makeup of the moral universe and describing the content of the major themes contained in the African view. Such a view includes “an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality”.

He deals extensively with the moral universe, observing the communal nature of what is given and the importance of maintaining the “life force” of the community: “The earth is given to humanity as a gratuitous gift and all human beings possess an equal claim to it and the resources it offers” (Magesa 1997:61).

What this means is that the created order can only be held in trust and not be subject to private ownership. Whoever the person of authority is (chief or leader), he has the responsibility of overseeing their use. Ultimately, all the creation belongs to God. Magesa sees that, as all human beings are children of God, no one can claim to have a monopoly of ownership over what God has placed in public trust for the public good (see Magesa 1997:62). On the same page he makes two contrasting claims: greed is a misuse of the universe and hospitality negates greed. When he deals with the relationship imperative in African culture he offers a strong statement about the essential need for the unity of the community:

The moral thought of African religion becomes clear through the understanding of relationships. The refusal to share is wrong. It is, in fact, an act of destruction because it does not serve to cement the bonding that is required to form community. Quite the contrary, it is an element that seeks to weaken and break such bonds. Nothing that weakens community bonds, or in any way helps to abet such weakening, can be morally wholesome (Magesa 1997:65).

He finishes this section of his book with a comment on the reason for taboos. These exist in order to make sure that the moral structure of the universe remains undisturbed for the good of humanity (Magesa 1997:76). This moral structure involves the maintaining of the life force of the community. Included in this structure is the ownership and stewardship of possessions within the context of the clan or family.

Magesa’s chapter on the need for community and communion with the ancestors lies outside the scope of this thesis and I have, therefore, not examined it here. Suffice it to say that there is once again an emphasis on communality and the inter-relatedness of all life.

Later in the book, when dealing with unifying factors, Magesa (1997:259) points out the necessity of good company that he defines as maintaining good relationships: “Good company implies community, that is, the establishment and maintenance of harmonious relationships among people.”

Magesa refers to practical sharing, communion and communication as being essential factors in the African political system. He then goes on to speak of the tribute that gets paid to a chief as being the means by which the chief, in time of need, can provide for his subjects (Magesa 1997:259). This aspect has been emphasised above and is a recurring theme in the theologians under consideration. In a section dealing with the “community of goods” he expresses an approach that is particularly relevant as it reflects the attitude toward possessions expressed by the theologians involved in inculturation. I find it helpful to allow him to set the tone by quoting the first paragraph of this section.

In Africa, organizations, whether social or political, presuppose the existence of material resources to sustain them. Decisions about the use of material resources usually depend on the moral values of the community, its expectations for co-operation and sharing, and its understandings of law and order. Also involved is the manner in which the material resources were acquired and how they are to be distributed or used (Magesa 1997:277).

When Magesa speaks about property and resources he is referring to natural or created wealth or the sources of wealth. He goes on to speak of the emphasis in African culture on the communal nature of property within a given community and uses the term inclusion to describe it. He gives a very interesting description of the different aspects of ownership operating in African culture. The problem appears to be the task of balancing exclusion and inclusion with regard to the acquisition and use of material resources, referring to the need to balance between: “the rights to the private ownership of property and the human meaning of the resources of the universe” (Magesa 1997:277).

He explains the African understanding that personal ownership always comes second to the right of access by the community to the basic resources necessary for life. Interestingly, this holds true for the chief or leader of the community, as I have referred to above, when he receives tribute in the form of cattle, grain or labour. Whatever he receives must be held in trust for the entire community (Magesa, 1997:278; 259). This basic understanding of communality in African culture means that relatives and friends expect to share one another’s property. Their notion of property is essentially one of communal ownership, implying that, even though one person may have the use of the property, when needed the community may call on the property to be made available. A rather extensive quote from Julius Nyerere in Magesa’s book sheds light on this understanding of property:

Personal property does exist and is accepted. But it takes second place in the order of things. Certainly, no member of the family goes short of food or shelter so that another member may acquire personal property. It is family property that matters,

both to the family as such and to the individuals in the family. And because it is family property, all members have an equal right to share in its use, and all have a right to participate in the process of sharing, in so far as time has not created its own acceptable divisions. Indeed, so strong is this concept of sharing that even in relation to private property there develops an expectation of use in time of need. The distinction, however, remains. In the case of family property each individual has a right; in the case of private property there may be an expectation but there is no automatic right (Magesa 1997: 279).

This notion leads Magesa to quote a comment made by Mbiti: “Since in African Religion the individual can exist as a person only in community, his or her well being can be assured only in the context of the well being of the community” (in Magesa 1997:279).

Some resources, such as land, may never be privately owned because they are a gift from God to all humans. The produce of the land can be personal, but not the land itself (see Leviticus 5:23). In some concluding remarks on this section it is clear that Magesa is contrasting the Western attitude of private ownership of goods and property with African communality as it applies to such goods and property. He mentions the inclusiveness of African life with regard to social, economic and religious spheres.

In African tradition production processes, and the disposition of goods and services, in short, production and distribution are expressions of underlying kinship obligation, tribal affiliation, and religious and moral duty (Magesa 1997: 281).

I have examined Magesa’s first book dealing with African religion because the insights into African Religion and culture that he offers is also reflected in his book dealing with inculturation.

Magesa refers to the biblical injunction to focus on the following people; the naked, the thirsty, the prisoner and the sick: “The poor are the purpose of his (Christ’s) mission” (Magesa 2005:10).

He proposes a meeting of equals formed of Western Christians and African Christians in order to bring about communion in Africa. He also refers to the communality expressed in the Holy Communion where the mutuality of the mission of Jesus is most significantly symbolised by the coming together of those who are worthy. Once again, in this short paper, he expresses his strong belief in the need for communality.

In his book on inculturation (*Anatomy of Inculturation*, 2004) Magesa has two sections that are of particular relevance for this chapter, one examines “community and personal freedom” and the other “the Church as the family of God”. These two sections are an expansion of approaches already expressed in a previous book (Magesa 1997). I intend to examine these two sections and then derive some conclusions by linking them with the views expressed in his earlier book.

When dealing with the community and personal freedom his opening remark expresses what I

have already posited in the section above: Many studies have established that the notion of community plays a determining role in the life of the African person. Apart from their community, African people are not fully persons (Magesa 2004:213).

He then goes on to speak of the imperative of being integrated into the community in order to safeguard personality and individuality. Subconsciously, the individual works within a system of taboos designed to maintain the harmony or 'life force' of the community. The imperative of building relationships and community is instilled in the individual from birth to death (Magesa 2004:213). He then deals with the cult of the ancestors that he says is the foundation of African religiosity. From there on he deals with the way the African understanding of community should be the necessary context for the gospel to be applied. He uses a biblical metaphor to describe this process, referring to the gospel being the yeast in the dough or the seed in the ground that grows into a big tree.

The dough and the ground are, of course, the African understanding of community (Magesa 2004:214).

Magesa sees the central point of Jesus' message as the establishment of a new community, a new Israel, seen in the early church movement that eventually became the established church. This new community must be found in and emerge from within the African understanding of community and community life (Magesa 2004:214). The conclusion may be drawn that Magesa considers African communality to be closer to the type of community expressed by Jesus in the gospels. He does, however, emphasise the message of Jesus as expanding the boundaries of community beyond the bounds of African understandings of communality. He refers to Galatians 3:27-28 and the eradication of distinctions in this new community. One of the comments he makes has to do with the worth of the individual that he sees from a biblical perspective. That is, that the worth of the individual does not come from belonging to the community but from God himself (see Magesa 2004:214).

Significantly, he still maintains that people cannot begin to grow towards the full stature of their dignity as the image of God unless it leads them to community (1 John 3:11-5:12) (Magesa 2004:214). This reflects the biblical notion of the people of God and the Holy nation (see 1 Peter 2:9). His emphasis is undeniably on the essence of communality as vital to not only African Christianity but as essential to Christianity generally.

In approaching the church as the family of God, Magesa begins by quoting from the 1994 African synod and the address of Pope John Paul II. I quote parts of this extract that I consider relevant to the subject of this thesis.

This image (the family of God) emphasises care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust – favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular churches (Magesa 2004:278).

The following fairly lengthy quote from this section is significant for understanding Magesa's approach to ownership and stewardship in the African church context.

If the Church is a community, as it is meant to be, it cannot but be made up of people who care for others in a concrete way. This in Africa is manifested in the reality of the family beyond the West's nuclear conception of it. Taking care of the poor, the sick, the orphans and the otherwise poor, as the Gospels instruct us, is in Africa the responsibility of any and all members of the family. It is, in fact, an expectation. Refusal to accept this responsibility incurs, beyond a feeling of guilt the probability of disrupting the community with attendant suffering (Magesa 2004:278).

In conclusion the following points may be offered as representative of Magesa's thinking:

1. All people are created as children of God.
2. Because God is the originator of all things everything needs to be held in communality in order to preserve harmonious relationships.
3. All possessions are to be held in trust for God and the clan and individual ownership assumes the nature of stewardship.
3. There is an emphasis on practical sharing. The reference to the chief who receives tribute but should hold it in trust for the clan to use in time of need is pertinent (Magesa 2004:278).
4. Decisions about the use of material resources and possessions demand the assent of the community (Magesa 1997:277).
5. Magesa has a good approach to the private ownership of property as long as it is held within the universal understanding of a theocratic ownership of all things.
6. His approach to the worth of the individual breaks with the African concept of worth deriving from the community and sees the individual worth as deriving from God himself.

5.4. John Mbiti

John Mbiti understands African life as being inundated with religion and this forms a background to his approach to African theology. Every part of life in African culture has significant aspects (see Mbiti 1969: 103). He speaks of a deep sense of kinship being one of the strongest forces in traditional African life: "Apart from localizing the sense of kinship, clan systems provide closer human co-operation, especially in times of need" (Mbiti 1969:106).

Times of difficulty, such as having to pay fines caused by being involved in an accident, will see the clan being called upon for help. The finding of enough goods to pay for a wife or giving financial support to students would also see the clan being called upon for help (Mbiti 1969:106). The understanding of mutual responsibility is particularly strong in rural contexts and there is an expectation of help from the community whenever it is needed. One can find a parallel between what he is describing here and the biblical understanding of church, although it is impossible to comment further on that here.⁷

Mbiti describes the extent of the African family with its vast extended family network. Once again he makes mention of the existence of the individual being dependent upon the clan or tribe:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people; whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual (Mbiti 1969:108).

One can therefore conclude that Mbiti places an emphasis on the corporate nature of African existence and on the communality of goods. In his *Introduction to African Religion* he refers to very definite moral standards that guide people in doing what is right and good for both their own sake and that of their community (Mbiti 1969:175). The above reflects his earlier writings. In later writings he comments on how the concepts of communication and community present close parallels in the Bible and African culture (1994:35). He draws out the similarities between the socio-political life of Israel and that of African communities: “At many points I see intriguing parallels between the biblical record and African religiosity” (Mbiti 1980:2).

Mbiti is here referring to the passages dealing with the communality of goods and possessions, even to fixed property. African people are aware of this and feel that they have a place in the Bible and that the Bible speaks about their situation (Mbiti 1994:35). Mbiti sees that even the Bible being read and interpreted comes under the umbrella of this community orientation: “Biblical teachings are considered in the light of this pervasive awareness of community” (Mbiti 1994:36).

The centrality of community in traditional African culture is a major factor influencing inculturation and is of significance in understanding the notion of possessions in the African church today. In a section dealing with hospitality and property Mbiti points out the deep sense of community that lies behind hospitality in African culture:

⁷ In a discussion with Dr. Bernard Musembi regarding this factor, he explained to me how happy his village would be because he has a nice vehicle, can afford a nice house. In fact, they will rejoice with him at his good fortune. However, if a member of his village needs to use his vehicle, even if it is in the middle of the night, he will be woken up and asked for the car.

It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead (1969:177).

A communal understanding concerning the right and wrong use of property and belongings also exists (see Mbiti 1969:177). These rules cover the use of family belongings.⁸ What is true for the family has a similar impact upon the community: “There are morals concerning the social, economic and political life of the people as a whole” (Mbiti 1969:178).

One of the areas covered by these morals concerns the offering of mutual help in time of need. This area is of particular concern for this study as it refers to the communality of possessions in African culture. Amongst a list of actions considered to be morally good, Mbiti refers to working hard, being hospitable, being considerate, helping others, etc. Mbiti sees the phenomenal growth of the church in Africa as hinging upon its relationship with African Traditional religion. This is particularly relevant where the AIC’s are concerned. From the aspect of inculturation Mbiti’s perspective is that the preparation of Africa for the reception of the gospel has been a major factor in the rapid spread of the church, particularly the AIC’s. This preparedness has under-girded the spreading of the gospel like wildfire among African societies that had hitherto followed and practiced traditional religion. Consequently, people are discovering that biblical faith is not harmful to their religious sensibilities (Mbiti 1980:4).

Once again the major emphasis in this respect relates to the concept of family and belonging to a community, this being easily understood within the context of African communality. It is the understanding of the communality taught in the Bible that draws Mbiti to the conclusion that there is much in common between biblical Christianity and African traditional religion. For the purposes of this thesis, reference needs to be made to the aspect of the availability of possessions referred to as a common practice in traditional African culture. Mbiti clearly sees this as an essential factor needing to be re-introduced into the Western church in order to counteract the essential individuality of Western Christianity and its concomitant selfishness.

5.5. Aylward Shorter

Shorter, commenting on the need for the Catholic churches to become self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting expresses the following:

⁸ Colleagues of mine were recipients of this hospitality while travelling in the Masai area of Kenya. Their car broke down and a kind person towed them into the nearest village where room was made for them in some person’s house. This was given without any sense of the person being imposed upon.

We believe that in order to achieve this we have to insist on building church life and setting to work on basic Christian communities in both rural and urban areas (Shorter 1988:264).

From the synod of 1994 there has been an emphasis on small communities in the Roman Catholic Church's strategy for evangelism in Africa. This has implications regarding understanding the approach of inculturation towards the use of resources, as there is a clear emphasis on the need for developing communities that are self-supporting. Inevitably this will mean a more communal life style. In a paper dealing with how far inculturation should go, Shorter answers the question with an extremely positive response: the sky is the limit, as long as the authentic demands of both faith and culture are respected (Shorter 2006:1). Although Shorter is dealing with the wider subject of the whole operation of the church in a particular society, there are segments that are of relevance for this thesis. For instance, his comment on the ascending Christology in the African church refers:

An example of an ascending Christology is provided by the experience of base communities in Urban Africa. From their reading of the Bible, members of these communities understand the humanity of Jesus from their own experience of being human. In their concern for social justice and in their compassion for the poor and the sick they celebrate the compassion and healing activity of Jesus (Shorter 2006:5).

Although Christology is not the focus of this thesis Shorter's reference to caring for the poor and sick renders this quote applicable. This incorporation of Biblical norms of caring into an African traditional setting as well as the incorporation of African co-responsibility into a Western church setting gives a good description of inculturation.

In a fairly recent book, which he co-authored, Shorter displays grave concerns over the inroads being made into the Catholic Church by Neo-Pentecostal movements and comments on the incipient materialism displayed in these movements. His objections give some idea of where he stands as a theologian in relation to Western Christianity and the inroads made into Western Christianity by capitalism:

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the faith gospel formula is, to a great extent, a child of modern secular materialism emanating from the Americas, and that, for some of its exponents, religion is a way of making money. It is, in fact, a religious form of economic rationalism. I believe it is not too much to claim that emerging religious movements are part and parcel of the secular global phenomenon. It is also apparent that they pay scant respect to African traditional culture (Shorter 2001:36).

The last sentence of this quote is patently relevant to this chapter. As I have already shown, the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal movements have by and large demonised African culture and adopted Western culture. Shorter cites examples of Africans who have deliberately exploited the

religiosity of their own people and used the ministry to enrich themselves (Shorter 2001:39). This is a particular affront to African traditional culture that is philosophically opposed to the incipient consumerism portrayed in much of the practices Shorter is referring to. In a previous work (1988) Shorter deals with the phenomenon of cultural change, giving some significant insights into modernisation and its effect upon culture. These comments apply because of the impact of modernisation on the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. He looks at technological change and its repercussions on social, political and economic life. This broad categorisation will obviously affect all areas of life, including culture, human relationships, institutions, values and ideals.

Exploration, imperialist expansion, colonial settlement and the facile subjugation of peoples with inferior technology and weaponry have all been the results of modernisation (Shorter 1988:50).

He points out that the net result of this invasion of capitalistic consumerism has been multiculturalism. A further effect of modernisation is the fostering of material values and a materialistic understanding of life's values. However, I deal with this particular aspect in a later chapter and will not comment further on it now. At this point Shorter is extremely pointed in his criticism of this shift.

(Modernisation) encourages the grossest forms of materialism and creates the so-called consumer society. Society consumes technology, as it were, and places the highest possible value on material products (Shorter 1988: 51).

Quoting Kavanaugh, Shorter goes on to give the values of modernism as possessions, power, prestige and pride (Shorter 1988:52). Much of what comes through in Shorter's writings bears the stamp of a Catholic background tending toward asceticism. There is an obvious reaction to the growing materialism of the African continent and the effect it has on life and culture. He is also extremely critical of the secularism that comes from what he calls EuroAmerica, seeing this as being part of the consumerist globalisation of Africa (Shorter 1997:1).

When he deals with "Secularism as consumer materialism" Shorter links consumer materialism with wealth and the creation of wealth, since the affluent are the principal consumers. In the next chapter of this thesis examine the statement he then makes regarding the cultures of the third world:

The indigenous cultures of the non-Western world are powerless against the economic forces of Western capitalism (Shorter 1997:5).

From the perspective of this thesis it is fairly difficult to derive any conclusion from Shorter as his main focus in inculturation lies in the areas of liturgy, music and dance. However, he

expresses strong objections to the inroads made by capitalism and consumerism, albeit mainly in the area of creating secularism. These are the very factors that militate against the communality of traditional African culture.

5.6. Benezet Bujo

I have left Bujo to last as his approach is different from the other theologians whose work I have analysed in this chapter. In my opinion he is far more practical in his approach to inculturation. Bujo is clear in his understanding that enrichment is possible for both sides when two cultures come together. Western and non-Western cultures can yield a rich harvest from each other (Bujo 2003:14). Bujo has much to say about the community and the individual as may be found in his chapter on Western Christian ethics and African anthropology in a section entitled “Individual responsibility in African ethics”. A section of this chapter deals with the use of property and possessions. Bujo quotes a Bashi proverb in this regard:

A clever or far-seeing man increases his drink [i.e. beer] with water (Bujo 2003:120).

Bujo’s understanding of this proverb is that the industrious person who keeps on trying will always increase his possessions. However, he places the industrious person firmly in the context of the community:

He must find this way and then take it. Before one helps one’s family, or the community *qua* community, one must be aware that this is possible only if all co-operate in the endeavour. One who works in order to acquire possessions is also in a position to give assistance (Bujo 2003:120).

In the above he is emphasising the responsibility of the individual against the common practice that has developed of considering the community or clan to be responsible to carry the individual. When he deals with the subject of the community and the individual he is quite clear about the individual carrying responsibility for him or her self. The impression is often given that community solidarity in Africa leads to the dissolution of individual identity. Certainly, one must not overlook the danger that the community may put the individual under pressure and force him to conform to the group; this is in fact often the case, but this is not in the least in accord with the ideal African community (Bujo 2003:121).

In “The Challenge of Inculturation”, Bujo deals with the normal issues involved in African traditional culture such as female circumcision, polygamy, sorcery and retaliatory actions. He then focuses on those issues that are of relevance for this thesis: the understanding of community and the abuse of hospitality.

When dealing with problems existent in an exaggerated understanding of community Bujo maintains that when this wrong understanding is present it allows for domination and goes against the use of the palaver. He cites the case of marriage where this exaggerated understanding prevents free consent to marriage. Once again he points out that the rights of such an individual must not be abused by the family or the community in a way that is contrary to that individual's will (Bujo 2003:168).

When he examines the modern sins of contemporary African society, Bujo speaks of those who live a socially parasitic existence that is at variance with genuinely African tradition. These people appeal to the hospitality that is to be offered by the extended family or African hospitality. He sees this as a trend in the big cities where there are:

Increasing numbers of people who live free of charge with relatives, friends or acquaintances for years on end and scarcely trouble to make a contribution to the domestic economy even through small tasks such as fetching water (Bujo 2003:169).

Bujo offers some advice for those who talk about the African way of life and seek to maintain it as a lifestyle. He quotes a Swahili proverb in this regard: "Treat your guest as a guest for two days, and give him a hoe on the third day" (Bujo 2003:170).

Bujo carefully calls for a precise study of African tradition in order to avoid the abuses he has alluded to. This shows that he is concerned with a right understanding of the ownership and stewardship of possessions from a traditional African perspective. He deals in detail with one of the most ubiquitous forms of corruption in Africa, the abuse of power by heads of state:

In the name of the Western understanding of private property, they enrich themselves at the expense of the people; at the same time, they also appeal falsely to the African tradition, which allows a chief greater access to possessions than his subjects (Bujo 2003:174).

He then mentions the widely known understanding that gifts given to the chief were for him to share his possessions with the people so that they could have life in fullness. He makes the point that the chief who uses these goods for his own exclusive use incurs guilt and that it would be the people's duty to depose him. Many heads of state avoid their traditional obligations in the name of a Western understanding of their rights (see Bujo 2003:174). Bujo mentions another misuse of African tradition where politicians fill their own pockets, but instead of thinking of the people as a whole, they share only with the members of their own clan. (Bujo 2003:174). He attacks much that is done in the name of tradition:

Egotistic self-enrichment, corruption, and nepotism withhold life from the people as a whole, and this is precisely the opposite of the tradition of the ancestors (Bujo 2003:174).

Bujo's position it may be seen in the following criticism he makes: African community and palaver ethics clearly criticise and challenge the Western models that have been discussed in this book (Bujo 2003:195).

5.7. Conclusion

From the perspective of a theology of possessions the theologians examined in this chapter have arrived at some rather interesting conclusions.

Magesa does an excellent job of applying biblical principles to the poor and the downtrodden, along with the biblical understanding of the worth of the individual, to bear upon the traditional African understanding of the worth of the individual.

Mbiti is very strong on the need to return to communality and, one could use the word, equity.

Shorter criticises Western capitalism as well as the selfishness inherent in the consumer society. His plea is for a return to co-dependency and the communality of the African culture.

Bujo expresses a concern for returning to African traditional culture without accepting the abuses that modern Western African society has adopted from capitalistic notions of possessions.

The threads running through the position of these theologians on a theology of possessions may be listed as follows:

There is a need for re-introducing African communality.

There is a need to emphasise family and family values.

There is a need to recognise the relativity of all of life.

They express a definite stance against Western capitalism.

The abuses of African traditional culture that have developed in modern day Africa need to be avoided.

Therefore, there is a need for individual responsibility to be recognised.

I will now draw these threads together and form an opinion as to how they impact on their notion of possessions.

a) The need for a re-introduction of African communality runs particularly strongly through all four theologians examined. Pertinent to this research is the notion of the commonality of life and the need to preserve the life force of the community. Along with this notion they all bring a strong emphasis on the need for sharing resources, being responsible for one another's well being and exhibiting generosity in terms of hospitality and the giving and receiving of possessions. This

may be described as impacting on the ownership and stewardship of possessions in a reaction to capitalistic consumerism.

b) Their emphasis on family life is expressed in their understanding of the interrelatedness of all life. There is a strong understanding of the human family so that the need to recognise all as family comes through. However, it is particularly in the area of the family and the clan that they bring in a need for maintaining responsibility for one another. Even more important is the need to maintain harmony in the life force of the community. This co-responsibility brings in the necessity of making possessions and resources available to those of the human family in need. The far-reaching repercussions of this stance are examined in the next chapter dealing with liberation theology.

c) This leads to the emphasis on the relativity of all life, even to that of inanimate things. Of particular relevance is the understanding that ties in with 1 Corinthians 12:26: if one member suffers then all members suffer. The inter-relatedness of all people is markedly emphasised here and has repercussions for applying 1 John 3:17 to the life of the church. "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" This applies to the ancestors as well as to the members of the clan.

d) All four theologians express extreme unhappiness with Western materialism and call for a far greater sharing of resources. The capitalist emphasis on accumulating personal possessions, while downplaying the needs of the underprivileged, is called into question, especially by Bujo, Shorter and Magesa. While recognising the need to balance personal possessions (individuality) with communal possessions (communality) they stress that there is an imbalance which is biased toward individuality and they call for a return to the balance of communality, with recognition of the individual's worth as part of the created order.

e) The abuses of capitalist individualism need to be guarded against, as does the parasitic abuse of the co-responsibility of the community or clan by those who will not work. Both these attitudes reflect a basic selfishness that goes against traditional African culture as well as against a biblical culture.

f) None of these inculturation theologians deny the need for the individual to take responsibility for working and providing for themselves. Therefore they avoid the trap of communality creating a denial of the individual and their responsibility.

These conclusions are relevant for an understanding of possessions. In line with the theologians of the early church through to the time of the reformation, these inculturation theologians call for

a sharing of possessions with the poor, for resources to be pooled, for a lack of avarice, for a recognition of humanity's oneness and for the perpetrators of capitalism to realise the extent of the damage they have done to the traditional culture of Africa.

There is an element of optimism in the demands being made. The inevitable results of globalisation will not be reversed without the whole global culture changing and the damage already done to third world cultures being reversed. On the other hand there is also insufficient recognition of the dictatorial approach often adopted by African leaders both now and in the past. Bujo makes it clear that there is often an idealising of the past in the work of African theologians. Communality seems to be an ideal to be strived for, but it can be emphasised to the detriment of the worth of the individual, although both Magesa and Bujo recognise this danger.

Chapter 6

From accumulation to redistribution: The voice of African Liberation Theology

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I pointed out how a concept of private ownership was introduced as part of the legacy of Western colonialism. This notion of private ownership was often legitimised through Christian missions to Africa. In African evangelical theologies the legitimacy of such a notion of private ownership is typically taken for granted. However, it is emphasised that the possessions which one owns should be used frugally and / or that one should exercise responsible stewardship of resources.

African expressions of liberation theology may be understood as a theological response to the impact of colonialism on African societies. In particular, South African liberation theologies of the 1970's and 1980's should be understood in the context of the struggle against apartheid. Drawing insights from European political theology, Latin American liberation theology and Afro-American black theology, church leaders and theologians such as Allan Boesak, Manas Buthelezi, Itumeleng Mosala, Buti Thlagale and Desmond Tutu made important contributions in responding to the challenges posed by apartheid rule.

Although liberation from both poverty (issues of class) and oppression (issues of race) was addressed, the quest for democracy remained at the forefront of such liberation theologies. Given the complexity of South African liberation theology, and especially the emphasis in this thesis on

a theology of possessions, my focus in this chapter is on liberation theologies emerging from elsewhere in Africa, although I have included Allan Boesak as a relevant voice. In the discussion below I investigate the contributions by Jean-Marc Ela, supported by Allan Boesak, Mary Getui, Gwinyal Muzorewa and Mercy Oduyoye.

I show how African Liberation theologies criticise the accumulation of possessions within capitalist economies (where legal ownership may be based on structural injustices), why they call for a redistribution of the means of economic production and what role the church could play in this regard.

6.2. A brief overview of Liberation theology

In this overview I relate certain points that are typical to liberation theology globally. These points were laid out in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches conference in Nairobi in 1970 and, while somewhat out of date, still carry the main thrust of liberation theology's concerns. The points are laid out in a paper entitled "A Theological Basis of Human Rights and Liberation" and could be summarised as follows:

a) Christian theology is a theology of liberation. The sick, the possessed, the leprous, the humiliated and the godless, experience Jesus as a concrete liberator from their concrete misery, and they believe in this liberation.

b) The theology of liberation is a theology about people. Theologically speaking, the human rights debate is located within the doctrine of anthropology. Theologically people are to be understood and defined in similitude (as a counterpart) to God. Created and redeemed by God; human beings have God-given rights.

c) The theology of liberation is a theology of the future. How can the ideal of human rights result in a concrete utopia that relates the intended human future of the human race to the specific political, social and racial injustice of the present in order to overcome opposition and resistance? Does the struggle for the realisation of human rights not presuppose an inner break in the national egoism and the class intellect or the racial mind-set? If Christians find their identity in the crucified Christ, then what relevance can national, cultural and economic identity still have for them (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:147)?

This summary highlights a tendency to expect the realisation of the Kingdom of God in its fullest expression in the present age. The point being that truly living the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount should result, at least for Christians, in the Kingdom of God emerging. The true identity of the Christian is then found in their citizenship of the Kingdom. Muzorewa concurs with the above

evaluation when he describes liberation theology in terms that have a strong bearing on an African understanding of the notion of possessions:

Liberation theology is the account of how believers are set free from both Third World oppressive structures inherited from colonialists and some created during the neo-colonial era, and Western theological as well as political dominance (Muzorewa 1985:53). It (liberation theology) must address the human condition and reflect upon what God is doing to alleviate it (Muzorewa 1985:54).

The implication of these two statements is that the gap between those who have and those who do not have needs to be realigned.

In order to arrive at the notion of possessions and the means of production held by African liberation theologians I examine Jean-Marc Ela in some detail and then support the conclusion following from that with reference to the other theologians I have named above.

6.3. Jean-Marc Ela

Ela is a Cameroonian theologian who serves as a priest in a rural area.

In dealing with Ela and endeavouring to arrive at some conclusions regarding his understanding of the ownership and stewardship of possessions I have not done an exhaustive study of his teachings. I have confined myself to one publication and also to relevant chapters of that publication. Ela's book, *African Cry*, has been termed "liberation theology with African content and original method: in short, a model of African liberation theology" (Ela 2005 commendation by Justin S Ukpong). In this publication I concern myself mainly with the chapter dealing with "An African Reading of Exodus" (Ela 1986:28-53), although I do also refer to the other chapters in the book.

Ela begins with an examination of an African understanding of Exodus in the light of the need for people to be delivered from economic and political oppression. His concern is that the Western spiritualising of the Exodus message will rob it of its intended impact upon peoples in historically depressed circumstances.

Our faith in the God of revelation cannot be lived and understood abstractly, in some non-temporal fashion. It can only be lived through the warp and woof of the events that make up history (Ela 1986:28).

Ela speaks of relevant theology as being that which deciphers revelation so as to apply it to the historical context. He sees this as relevant hermeneutics. He therefore rejects any interpretation of Exodus (or any part of scripture) that is concerned solely with the book in its historical context and does not take into consideration the historical context of the hearer (see Ela 1986:29). Regarding the fundamentalist exegesis practiced, Ela is scathing in his conclusions with regard to

the missionaries and their preaching:

The God of missionary preaching was a God so distant, so foreign to the history of the colonised peoples. Exploited and oppressed, they find it difficult to identify this God with the God of Exodus, who becomes aware of the situation of oppression and servitude in which the people find themselves (Ela 1986: 29).

This comment by Ela typically expresses the concerns liberation theologians have for the poor and the downtrodden, sometimes causing them to be extremely critical of any who are accumulators of wealth.⁹ Ela arrives at the following conclusion regarding the god who is preached to the people of Africa:

My point is this: The God proclaimed to the African human being in the precise context of the colonial situation is a god who is a stranger to the times, indifferent to political, social, economic, and cultural occurrences, having no prospect of involvement such as would necessarily be implied in the promise (Ela 1986:30).

Ela reflects the approach of many African and Western theologians who show that the Christian churches, in times of colonisation, commanded adaptation and submission to their existing order as well as to the existing order of society. Typical of this would be the way in which the church, generally, emphasised obedience to the powers that be without, at the same time, focussing on the wrongs in society. The preaching of an otherworldly gospel created what Ela calls a salvation that focussed on going to heaven. Missionaries failed to point out that, in the bible, the notion of salvation is permeated with that of liberation, and that salvation [or liberation] is expressed at once as present and future. Salvation is indeed the object of hope, but it has a present dimension as well (Ela 1986:30). Ela is concerned that the church has tended to hide behind an apolitical disguise thus reinforcing the dependency of the oppressed. This understanding has come about with the tendency to see the human being as a soul needing to be saved and, consequently, a neglect of the biblical emphasis on earthly values and its concern with human conditions. Ela sees this as being true of not only the African Christianity that is the context of his book, but also true of the global Christian message:

Globally the Christian message has been cut off from its political extensions, which give it its human concrete meaning (Ela 1986: 31).

He remarks upon the centrality of the Exodus to most of Israel's feasts and practices (see Ela 1986:31-33). Ela understands the message portrayed in Exodus as unceasingly opening out upon the future of a new creation, a new exodus (Ela 1986:33). When he states that we must seek the meaning of the God of the Exodus in light of the fact that the fulfilment of the promises is the locus of intelligibility of revelation as a whole (Ela 1986:33), he is bringing in the related

⁹ In this they find themselves aligned with evangelical theologians such as Anderson, Sider and Taylor.

concepts of the consummation, the Jubilee and the Kingdom of God. I observe this notion of the Kingdom being established in our time as a sort of Utopia common to liberation theologians. Without pre-empting the rest of this section and arriving at a conclusion too soon, one may observe that utopian thinking has been a problem in the conclusions of those who tend to ignore the inherent sinfulness of the human race.

Ela develops his argument, declaring God's intervention in history as being part of God's self-revelation, an interpretation that is generally accepted today. Where he begins to move into the radical aspect of liberation theology is found in the following statement:

Ultimately, revelation stirs up a community in exodus, whose mission is not only to live in expectation of the fulfilment of the promise, but also to promote the historical transformation of the world and of life (Ela 1986:35).

Ela calls for the church to avoid taking flight into the future and for the need to get involved in the historical now. Liberation theology may be seen as a clear call to dissatisfaction with the status quo, and for consequent constant change to the society we live in as well as in the church (see Ela 1986:35). In the light of this need for change he arrives at the conclusion that:

The prime interest in reading the Book of Exodus is to rescue the majority of African Christians from ignorance of the history of liberation. After all, this text is about nothing else. Moses is not sent to Egypt to preach a spiritual conversion but to lead Israel out of the house of slavery (Ela 1986:36).

Ela is concerned that communities held down by fatalism and resignation should not be ignorant of the history of today's liberation movements. He maintains that the Holy Spirit is working internally for the transformation of the world and that injustice and domination, with contempt for men and women and the violence that all these things engender, constitute a key aspect of the sin of the world (Ela 1986:37).

Ela, along with other African theologians, places Africa in a post exodus context because of the breakdown of colonialism and the return of exiles to their homelands. The post-exodus context is a fairly utopian one: a land flowing with milk and honey. This desire is understandable in the context of the plethora of suffering in Africa. He envisages the church as fulfilling the role of Moses, the leader of the exodus, and the one who brings the people to the land that has been promised. As may be seen from the above, the idea of world transformation, social ills being righted, the concerns of the poor being met, changes in the structures of politics and society, are

uppermost in Ela's thinking with regard to the message of Exodus.¹⁰

Ela also explores the role of the church as a perpetuator of structures of oppression and his conclusion may be summed up in his own words:

Religion performs a two-fold function here: It justifies oppression by pointing to the divine will and to respect for the established order. Then it offers an ideal compensation: the hope of paradise, where the poor will make up for all of their earthly unhappiness (Ela 1986:41).

He is scathing in his attack on the role the church has played in assisting colonisation and calls for change in the church's approach to the problems of Africa (see Ela 1986:41-44). Ela also deals with the failure of development and the consequent economic and social suffering of African people. He sees this factor as being one of the reasons for the emergence of African Independent churches. This is summarised in the following comment:

The effort to reconcile the bible with ancestral tradition was the product of hidden forces of liberation. While official Christianity was sinking in the quagmire of institutionalism and being domesticated by the colonial system, the messianisms (African Independent Churches) were asserting a will to autonomy, a desire for the independence of Africa. The very thing Marxism refuses to grant any religion appears in these religious movements: elements of liberation (Ela 1986:48).

He returns to the influence of the Exodus account in being formative to an understanding of liberation in the AIC's. He completes his argument by calling for the church to become involved in freeing the enslaved people of Africa. This involvement should derive the introduction of a deeper sense of community than presently exists:

Unless the activity of the church is to be reduced to a few pious declarations on the part of its shepherds in a pestilential climate of universal violence, faith communities must come into being that will be the vessels of the messianic hope of the poor in a society weighed down by the anguish of repression and regression (Ela 1986:52).

His expression of what he considers to be the task of the church takes the following form: in a context in which dominant and dominated peoples are locked in confrontation, the task of the church consists in revealing to human beings the face of Jesus the liberator in a faith practice and gospel rereading that will truly concretise the solidarity of the church with the poor and oppressed (see Ela 1986:53).

Ela also criticises the failure of development in the African context. He highlights the emergence of an elite bourgeoisie at the expense of the common people, noting that the Western colonialism

¹⁰ For an expansion of this concept see Ela 1986: 38 where he lays out a detailed understanding of what the role of the church should be and how it should fulfil its prophetic role.

that was dismantled has been replaced by an Africa form of colonialism that has resulted in almost no middle class, with a subsequent increase in poverty and in the peasants being in a worse state than before Western colonialism was broken down (see Ela 1986:54-72). Central to this problem is the disparity between those who amass possessions and those who have very little. He also condemns the foreign corporate conglomerates that exist only to derive profit from the African states they operate in and do not return part of their profits to the benefit of the indigenous population.

All opposition must be reduced to silence in order to promote national development. However, development here means the wealth of a minority at the expense of the masses (Ela 1986:73).

Ela is also concerned with the way in which African leaders use repression, on occasions to the point of torture, to suppress any opposition to the existing regime. He criticises the way in which the West has established conglomerates that contribute to the oppression of the poor. His contention is that the hidden empires of banking and finance have contributed to the absolute impoverishment of third-world countries (Ela 1986:74). The extreme disparity between the wealthy and the poor in Africa is of concern to Ela and he goes into detail to point out the wrongs in the structure of African society and the means by which the situation has developed and been allowed to persist:

It is probably in Africa that the situation of the human being is at its most tragic and serious, affecting as it does the existence of so great a number of the poor who are enslaved by a wealthy minority able to control the process of orientation, regulation and decision to their own advantage (Ela 1986:74).

Ela's concern for the poor surfaces again and again. He attacks the prevalence of black marketing, tax and customs fraud. He is scathing about graft, fraud, embezzlement of public funds etc. Once again he calls for the church to play a role:

If inequality in the distribution of the national fortune is a factor in the growing insecurity and violence, is not the real criminal the one who keeps back the portion of the poor? And yet, laws against theft, in certain countries, strike only social categories that lack protection in high places and are deprived of financial means. Then is it not the task of the church to be the conscience of the nation (Ela 1986:75)?

Human rights are suppressed in many countries in Africa. Ela examines the problem of church leaders who do not speak out against such circumstances as have been outlined by him. He wants the church to use its educational establishments to produce leaders who will exert influence in the corridors of power in order to free the oppressed and reduce inequality. A bridge can be built between the church and African society only if the church commits itself to live its faith, as well as the gospel it preaches, in the struggle to put an end to all manner of repression and inequality

(Ela 1986:78).

Thus far one may summarise Ela's position in terms of making a call for social and financial inequalities to be eliminated and for the church to play the role of a prophetic voice, calling the people out of slavery into their inheritance in the "promised land". The result desired would be to redistribute wealth in order to arrive at a more equitable society. Although he does not use these words I feel that in his thinking he has the promise God made to Israel in mind. Micah 4:4:

Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken Micah 4:4).

Ela also condemns the way in which the masses are suppressed in order to give privilege to those who work in cahoots with large foreign firms or reserve the opportunities of being in places of privilege in government for themselves (see Ela 1986:81 -85). In the light of what he has been saying, Ela raises a number of questions that I have condensed:

- How are we to understand development in an economy consisting of dependency structures?
- Can little people expect any improvement when the economy is structured for dependency and decision-making is taken out of their hands?
- Can there be a proper sharing when the wretched of the earth have no financial resources?
- Can there be real development when super profits are transferred out of Africa?
- Does the growth miracle not conceal a systematic plunder?

Ela expands on the concept of the relatedness of all people and the need for the communality of life to be recognised. His comment is pertinent: There is no development for me unless I share in the development of others (Ela 1986:89).

Ela calls for the church to transcend all forms of dualism and to assert the unity of body and soul, material and spiritual. If this dualistic understanding of life is excluded then there cannot be a gospel that is only spiritual. He develops this theme by emphasising Old Testament passages that refer to Israel's sin of making the worship of Yahweh a ritualistic, otherworldly, exercise that denies the situation of the masses in the nation. Ela refers to passages that deal with the mistreatment of the poor and underprivileged, such as Isaiah 58:6-7; Amos 2:6-7; Amos 8:4-6, and Jeremiah 22:13-14. The following quote serves to sum up his position:

In poor countries, the church should constantly, actively, stand on the side of the poor and underprivileged. It must lead men and women to holiness by joining them in their struggle against injustice (Ela 1986:99).

Finally, conclusions can only be drawn from the general tenor of Ela's writings, as he does not

devote any chapter to dealing exclusively with the problem of the ownership and stewardship of possessions. His main theme is to call for a major renewal of society in order to redress the inequalities between the wealthy and the poor. He criticises the accumulation of wealth in a capitalist system that derives from oppressive and unjust structures that favour the haves above the have-nots. He emphasises the value of small communities that would be more able to exercise sharing and co-responsibility. However, his major concern is with corporate business and entrenched corrupt politicians who have ignored those who live in poverty and have accumulated wealth and privilege at the expense of the poor. Ela calls for wealth, in the form of possessions and the means of production, to be redistributed in order to develop a society where there is no one in dire need as well as no one having vastly more than they need. In other words, he expects those who have accumulated wealth to be ready to give some of that wealth away to those who are the victims of oppression, whatever may have been the cause of their situation, so that they may enjoy the basic necessities of living.

6.4. Some Liberation theologians who have contributed to a theology of possessions

6.4.1. Allan Boesak

Boesak is a Dutch Reformed Theologian who was active in the anti-apartheid movement. Even though Boesak is taken up with the topic of “blackness” in his book *Farewell to Innocence*, he does give some insights into an understanding of the notion of possessions from the perspective of liberation theology. Much of Boesak’s position derives from Luke 4:18-21 (Jesus’ declaration of his mission) and the conviction that this passage refers to the Jubilee (see Boesak 1976:24). He emphasises that the passage refers to the materially poor and not just the poor in spirit. Boesak is concerned at the disparity between the wealthy and the poor and the need for the church, and society, to understand this passage of scripture as calling for what has been accumulated through oppression and injustice to be redistributed:

The poor Jesus was speaking about can only be understood as those who are materially poor in the first place, in other words, those who die of hunger, who are illiterate, who are exploited by others, those who do not even know that they are being exploited, who are denied the right to be persons (Boesak 1976:22).

Boesak understands the Jubilee as expressing a call for the restitution of what has been lost and a redistribution of assets in order to bring about a fair ownership of possessions and resources. He calls for Christians (particularly) to take the side of the poor and oppressed and to work for a new humanity and a new world (Romans 6:4, 12:2) by challenging the structures that perpetuate

inequality and do not reflect the Kingdom of God (see Boesak 1976:145). His call is for the church to be the true church as defined by him in the following way:

Liberation theology seeks a church that ministers to the poor, not merely with a sense of compassion, but with a sense of justice. This means that the church ought to discover that the state of poverty is ugly, impermissible, and unnecessary; that conditions of poverty and underdevelopment are not metaphysical but structural and historically explicable. In other words, poverty is one side of the coin, of which the other side is affluence and exploitation (Boesak 1976:147).

If the church wants to be Christ-like, then it would need to take up the cause of the poor and downtrodden and seek to alleviate their lot. One of the concepts that Boesak puts forward is a return to an African order of society in which communality is an essential factor that prevents the accumulation of wealth and possessions in the manner of a Western capitalistic economy. Boesak is not simply concerned with the need for the church to change, but is convinced that the coming of the Kingdom will be seen in societal changes as a stronger sense of community returns. Boesak's notion of communality and stewardship stops short of a Marxist economy as he still retains certain elements of mutual accountability. This demands a more fair distribution of goods and resources in order to close the gap between the rich and the poor.

6.4.2. Mary Getui

Another theologian who has made a contribution to the debate on the ownership and stewardship of possessions is Mary Getui. She is the Dean of the Humanities Faculty at Kenyatta University in Kenya. In an article in the book *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity* entitled "Material Things in Contemporary African Society" she covers a number of issues that are of relevance to the subject of this thesis.

Firstly she shows that the most basic contributors to healthy living are things such as, food, water, shelter, sex, medical attention, etc. These factors derive from healthy people, land, houses, means of production and payment, mainly for services rendered (Getui 1999:59). She emphasises the notion of life being holistic, especially when viewed in an African context, because healthy existence is considered to consist at once of material and spiritual factors. In expressing this understanding Getui comments that:

If God's design and desire is that material things are among the necessary and useful components that make his children happy and comfortable, one would expect a situation where most of the material things are available and accessible to all people in the world (Getui 1999:60).

She points out that the reality of the position in which the world's majority finds itself is that of poverty and all its consequent ills. Getui is quite clear that the position where a few nations live in

excess whilst the majority live in poverty is a portrayal of inequality and hence social injustice, which is not in line with God's plan for humanity (Getui 1999:62). She puts forward a solution representative of the way liberation theologians think. She is convinced that poor countries will never experience adequate development unless rich countries reduce the amount of the total they consume. This involves a programme of de-development of the rich world. The rich must live more simply than the poor may simply live (Getui 1999:64).

Not only is it the rich nations that need to evolve a simpler lifestyle. Getui also sees a need for the affluent minority that has developed in most African countries during post-colonial years to recognise that it is wrong for many to suffer lack while others have an overabundance of possessions. She mentions how consumerism has penetrated African society until people assess the value of others in terms of possessions – land, cars, houses, money etc. (Getui 1999:65). This means that the influence of the individualism of capitalism has produced a selfish, uncaring culture that finds difficulty in sharing the good things that have been accumulated.

Secondly, she links wealth and power together and expresses concern over the way in which those who possess material things have many other advantages as well, but that these advantages are often used to exploit the poor (Getui 1999:67). Poverty and being vulnerable are linked in Getui's thinking. Wealth goes with power and Getui assesses many African politicians as notorious exploiters of their people (Getui 1999:67). She refers to this as being happy at someone else's expense. The extent of corruption in Africa is another matter of concern and Getui judges the intense desire for material possessions and the means used to accumulate them as being ungodly (Getui 1999:68). She calls for a better distribution of the means of production as well as the goods produced in order for greater communality to exist:

Where the goods produced are only in the hands of a few, there is something wrong; excessive consumerism is a great sin, but consumption is not in itself wrong and should be for righteous living, good community living (Getui 1999:68, 69).

Finally, Getui develops the case for resources to be more fairly distributed so that, from a moral and theological perspective, Africa may begin to experience the Kingdom of God. She quotes Van Oyen as maintaining that, for Africa to experience affluence, two pre-conditions have to be met. The one is religious (the state of faith) and the other social (affluence must be shared) (see Getui 1999:69). She understands this in an African context as being a reference to the belief that all the resources of the universe, as well as the gifts and skills we possess, come from God (Getui 1999:69). It should therefore be accepted that all things must be used for God's glory and that we should not become obsessed with material wealth. What then is her solution to the prevailing

disparity among those who live in African societies?

The best approach to material possessions should be that of detachment, simplicity and communism (communalism) which touches on and brings in the pre-condition, that of sharing (Getui 1999:70).

Because of this notion, Getui is clear that those who have much in the way of resources need to exercise increased responsibility towards their fellow human beings. Getui uses illustrations from the early church to prove her point, some of which have already been alluded to in chapter 2. Once again the notion is raised that possessions are given, not only for the individual to enjoy, but also for the good of others. The whole community should be enriched when an individual is blessed.

The African concept of kinship as practiced in the traditional society is also something that can be applied in the service of others (Getui 1999:70).

The truth she expresses is that Africa will not be helped by an excessive competitiveness with other continents and nations, but will be helped by an understanding of the commonality of all peoples. In her own words:

Each individual ought to adopt a sense of accountability, responsibility and integrity in the understanding of, approach to, and the use of material things (Getui 1999: 71).

Getui renders a call for wealth and possessions to be redistributed because of the development of a greater sense of stewardship and responsibility for our fellow human beings. She puts forward a cogent argument for Christians to recognise the need to live more simply in order to see that all people have enough. However, her call is not simply for the equal redistribution of resources but for a responsible use of that which has been accumulated, as well as the need to accept the weak and poor as those who are in need of empowerment and acceptance.

6.4.3. Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Oduyoye is a Methodist feminist liberal theologian. Her writings are not aimed specifically at the understanding of possessions. Nevertheless there are insights in her writings that can be applied to the subject of possessions. In her own description of liberation, she describes it as follows:

Liberation presupposes the existence of an unjustifiable situation that has to be eliminated. All limitations to the fullness of life envisaged in the Christ event ought to be completely uprooted (Oduyoye 1995:4).

Regarding community, Oduyoye refers to the prayers of ATR as evidencing a daily involvement of the whole life circle; God, the divinities and the ancestors, as being fully involved in the well being of the community (Oduyoye 1995:114). She further comments that ATR also acknowledges that procreation, health, and wealth are the indices of the good life that derives

from being in harmony with the spirit powers (God, divinities, ancestors) and with the people one encounters in daily life (Oduyoye 1995:114). In a call for change, relating particularly to the role and standing of women, Oduyoye calls for the greater involvement of all people, men, women, youth included.

The church should enable all people to enter in hope into the struggles of others, to seek creatively to suffer our way through contradictions, to cope joyfully with diversities and with the varieties of being human and to celebrate them. Liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together on the journey home, with the church as the umbrella of faith, hope, and love (Oduyoye 1995:185).

Oduyoye emphasises relationships and community as being vital to the church and is concerned over the position of women in church relationships. She draws attention to the fact that we Christians, who form the church, will be judged by how we relate with one another as human beings, how we relate as human beings to our environment, and to the Source Being (Oduyoye 1995:186). She expresses concern over what the church should be about in Africa and emphasises community related issues. The following issues are included in her inventory of needs:

quandaries of economy, political instability, poverty, oppression, and pretended innocence of sexism. Then we shall begin to build a community of interpretation, breaking our old habits of treating the bible as an oracle used by priests and preachers who tell us the will of God (Oduyoye 1995:186, 187).

This declaration follows on from her unhappiness with the way that the scriptures are spiritualised by Western, mainly evangelical, theologians and the denial that there are concrete daily life applications. Some of the statistics she refers to in her book express the discrepancies existent in African society where 80% of the labourers in the farming and agricultural sectors are women (Oduyoye 1995:210). This indicates that the means of production is restricted to those who own the land and have the means of production. Very often these same rural workers live in abject poverty while the landowners enjoy the accumulation of wealth produced by their labourers. While there is no direct reference to possessions in Oduyoye's writings the obvious conclusion is that she is concerned with all forms of inequality and the need to restructure society in order for the oppressed to experience a more equitable share of the goods produced in the African context. This would include possessions and the means to improve their lot in life such as access to the means of production, a sharing in the accumulated wealth derived from an unjust system, and the opportunity to build a better life. As a feminist she also calls for the breaking down of some of the traditional African structures that result in prejudice toward certain categories of people such as women.

6.4.4. Gwinyai Muzorewa

Muzorewa of Zimbabwe is a systematic and liberation theologian. He is committed to the true liberation of the independent African nations. His most recent publication is *Know thyself: Ideologies of Black liberation* (2005).

He mentions the African school of thought that understands liberation theology as a theology of cultural liberation that can set us free from our cultural limitations and bondage.

Liberation from a colonial mentality, and African cultural mentality including a narrow African world-view which would blind us, or hinder the opening of new horizons, is needed in order to create more humanising socio-economic and political conditions (Muzorewa1985: 62).

He describes liberation theology as a theology occurring in the context of African culture. Yet, the church needs to liberate itself from cultural forces when they contradict the gospel (see Muzorewa1985: 66). Muzorewa quotes Tutu as stating that it is from suffering, oppressed and exploited people that all liberation theology originates (Muzorewa1985: 66).

A theology of liberation teaches that God has power, and that God hears (and cares about) the cries of the oppressed, the poor, the destitute, and takes positive action to deliver them from evil and death (Muzorewa1985: 68). In his conclusion there is a definite call to the oppressed to rise above their circumstances and to see themselves as victors and participants in the divine economy of salvation. He understands liberation theology as aligning itself with a need for restructuring society in order to bring about greater equity in the economic and political areas.

6.5. Conclusion

Jean-Marc Ela and the other four theologians examined in this chapter display certain commonalities in spite of their different backgrounds and contexts.

Ela writes out of the broad context of the field of ethics and is primarily concerned with issues of liberation dealing with colonialism, the corrupt heirs of ex colonial structures, corrupt politicians and the multi nationals emerging with globalisation.

Boesak has his context firmly in the anti-apartheid movement and the emergence of black consciousness.

Getui writes out of a West African academic context with a concern for the general usage of material possessions throughout Africa.

Oduyoye writes out of the context of black feminism and the desire to see all downtrodden people released into an understanding of their freedom.

Muzorewa writes as a Systematic Theologian and examines different streams of liberation theology in the African context.

There is agreement between them in the interpretation of the typical passages referred to by liberation theologians in general. An example of these would be Luke 4:18, Leviticus 25:35-38, Acts 4: 32-35, James 5: 1-6, Luke 6: 20-26, and the whole of the Exodus from Egypt. Most of the African liberation theologians draw on the South American theologian Gutierrez and his emphasis on the dramatic increase in the state of poverty in which the majority of the world's population finds itself. This would apply more particularly to African peoples. There is also an emphasis on the disparity between the rich and poor nations. All of them call for a more realistic approach toward the Kingdom of God being for the present and the subsequent eradication of poverty and misery. Whether they would opt for the sort of utopian thinking that sees the total eradication of poverty and the redistribution of all wealth as a possibility would be to stretch their argument too far. What they do argue for is that the Kingdom is a place where those who have wealth and possessions derived from monopolising the means of production and the accumulated assets of such production, share those assets with liberality and responsibility.

None of them would completely deny capitalism and the benefits it has brought but all would call for a change in society in order to prevent the accumulation of wealth by the few at the expense of the many. There is a particular concern for the poor as they contend that the Kingdom belongs to the poor (Luke 6:20) and the rich have no part in the Kingdom (Luke 6:24). These theologians are against the exclusive rights of private property as practiced in a Western cultural setting as they consider them to be contrary to the notion of communality as expressed in African culture. The wealthy must share with the poor in order for a measure of equity to be established. Because the benefits of technology have not been shared with all people they call for society to be restructured according to a civilisation of poverty that is understood as being able to bring forth equality. All these theologians see the world as being divided into the wealthy North and the poor South.

These theologians call for the establishment of a new civilisation that is aptly described by Fitzgerald as quoted by Rowland:

The construction of this new civilisation is to be initiated in our own time by an economic order based on the satisfaction of "basic needs" as a fundamental human right. If the basic needs of ordinary people are not met, then whatever the legal and political institutions there is no real respect for human dignity and world peace is endangered. The minimum requirements of these basic needs; of nutrition, health, education, housing and employment are self-evident to the poor (Rowland 1999:221).

The theologians examined call for a model of development that will satisfy these basic needs as the first step in the process of liberation, thus empowering humanity to be free to be what it ought to be – as long as this development does not become a new mechanism for domination.

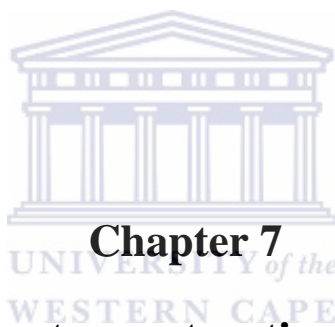
As has been stated previously in this thesis there is a strong Protestant tradition of the obligations and responsibilities of the stewardship of resources and possessions being understood and accepted. However, liberation theologians place a stronger emphasis on the need for redistributing what has been accumulated, as they understand the means of this accumulation as being essentially evil. All people are God's people and as such have a right to a share of the good things of life. This approach differs from the essential individualism of the Protestant ethic in that it places the right to distribution in the hands of workers as well as owners thereby ensuring a fairer distribution. One might say that liberation theologians are calling for a true democracy with regard to the distribution of that which is produced as well as that which has been accumulated. They still hold with private ownership but in a modified form, which takes into account the overall ownership of all things by God therefore giving more validity to communal decision-making.

The description that fits is a call for a more equitable distribution of wealth and possessions while at the same time seeking for a radical restructuring of society in order to facilitate such distribution. This would mean some form of governmental involvement, perhaps in the way of taxation, in order to take from the haves and then to give to the have-nots. A further way would be voluntary sharing and their understanding is that this could be done more viably in a church setting.

In summary I give three salient points concerning Liberation theology:

- They are concerned that, within the neo-liberal capitalist systems of economics, the legal ownership of possessions is based on an unjust accumulation of the means of production.
- They want a broader basis of ownership to include the community, at least in the context of the church.
- They recognise a call for redistribution of the means of production in society.

In the following chapter I will examine reconstruction theologians who take the notion of possessions and ownership a step further and who maintain that liberation theologians have not gone far enough.



Chapter 7

From redistribution to constructive societal change: the contribution of reconstruction theology

7.1. Introduction

Reconstruction theology emerged as an approach to African theology especially during the 1990's. In this chapter I investigate the work of mainly three authors who may be regarded as representative of such a theology of reconstruction, namely, Jesse Mugambi (see 1989,1995, 1997, 2005), Charles Villa-Vicencio (see 1994; 2006) and, in a derivative sense, Bennie Van der Walt (2003).

I will demonstrate that a theology of reconstruction should be regarded as a form of postcolonial discourse that recognises the need for liberation from political and economic forms of colonialism and neo-colonialism. It therefore builds on the insights of liberation theology and its emphasis on a redistribution of possessions. Besides the above (liberation theology) there is a body of theologians who do not see inculturation or liberation theology as a solution to the problems facing the church and society in Africa today, but choose to adopt a theology of reconstruction as

the answer to those issues which relate to the situations raised by differing world views and notions of possessions. These theologians would include JF Durand, Jesse Mugambi, Mfaniseni Sihlongonyane, Charles Villa-Vicencio and Barend Van der Walt. Mugambi says:

This interpretation (i.e. reconstruction theology) seeks to elaborate from the scriptures the aspects that portray God and his people re-creating a new world order (Mugambi 2001:1).

Reconstruction theology therefore offers a Christian basis for recreating the African social economic reality from a scriptural perspective. As the Bible calls for the proper stewardship of possessions as well as a concern for the poor, reconstruction theology draws on these values in calling for society to display similar values.

Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio may be regarded as leaders of this movement (see Maluleke 1997:22, 2005:491). They call for a pro-active theology of reconstruction. I include Barend Van der Walt because of his approach to the problems of Africa as outlined in his book *Understanding and Rebuilding Africa* (2003).

7.2. Jesse Mugambi ¹¹

Jesse Mugambi, one of the foremost contemporary African theologians, is currently based in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. He is a prolific author and editor and is also the director of Acton Publishers. In his writings he addresses a wide range of issues, including African culture and religion, ecumenical relationships, economic justice and environmental concerns. His volume of essays entitled, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the cold war* (1995), may be regarded as one of the most significant texts on a theology of reconstruction in Africa. In this section I focus on especially two essays in this volume, namely, “From liberation to reconstruction” and “Theological reconstruction in Africa”. I also refer to an essay entitled “Christian Mission in the Context of Urbanisation and Industrialisation in Africa” (Mugambi 1997). I make further reference to comments in a paper he delivered to the Anglican Church leadership in the Great Lakes region in 2005 entitled, “Applied Ethics and Globalisation: an African Perspective”, as well as an article in Kalu (ed. 2005) entitled “Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage”.

7.2.1. Mugambi’s move from liberation to reconstruction

In his earlier works leading up to the publication of *African Christian theology: An introduction* (1989) the dominant theological concept that Mugambi employed was that of liberation.

¹¹ In this section on Jesse Mugambi I have drawn heavily on an unpublished essay by Ernst Conradie entitled, “African perspectives on the ‘whole household of God’ (oikos)” written for a forthcoming Festschrift for Jesse Mugambi.

Liberation was understood by him as political liberation from colonial oppression (the self-determination of nation states) but also from continued forms of economic deprivation and injustice as well as freedom from imposed cultural norms. Liberation was also understood as a theological category, namely, in terms of a prerequisite and essential component of salvation, understood as a comprehensive sense of communal health:

Such salvation is defined as the ultimate hope of realizing or attaining self-realization and self-fulfilment (Conradie 2006:6).

Liberation may be regarded as the dominant metaphor in Mugambi's earlier writings (Conradie 2006:6). Mugambi's work, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the cold war* (1995), signalled a shift to the employment of "reconstruction" as a key theological category. This has to be understood in the context of the end of the cold war, a recognition that processes of urbanisation and industrialisation are irreversible in the African context, political independence existing in virtually all African countries, continued forms of economic injustice and neo-colonialism, but also the endemic problems around a democratic culture, endless civil wars and corruption that plague many African countries. Three essential features of Mugambi's approach to the category of reconstruction are important, namely, 1) the recognition that there is no prospect of returning to pre-colonial Africa signals the need to construct African societies anew in the face of current societal processes, 2) liberation from political and economic repression remains essential for the very possibility of such reconstruction, 3) There is a need amongst Africans to accept responsibility for governance in church and society.

In spite of his admission that there is no prospect of a return to pre-colonial Africa, Mugambi is clear that the accepted unit of social life in Africa is the extended household and this notion keeps influencing his understanding of reconstruction. In his earlier publications Mugambi had laid a foundation regarding his understanding of the Kingdom of God that he remains true to in his later works. He regards the way in which evangelical theologians are inclined to spiritualise the biblical concept of liberation as based on improper exegesis, because it denies the practical aspect of salvation as it is worked out in daily circumstances and focuses mainly on the future life. He concludes that only by understanding salvation as being applicable to the material, social, political and psychological needs in the present can the gospel be relevant to the poor and the exploited (Mugambi 1989:97).

This earlier publication puts forward a number of thoughts which appear to be foundational to Mugambi's thinking and which are repeated in later publications. In spite of his earlier excursions into liberation theology there is a marked shift from liberation and the

redistribution of resources to the understanding that society needs to be reconstructed that is emphasised by him in his later publications. His notion of reconstruction carries connotations derived from the engineering and social sciences and advocates the co-operation of multidisciplinary sources in order to produce the desired reconstruction:¹² Mugambi views the task of reconstruction in Africa in the 21st century as similar to that in Europe after the Second World War (Conradie 2006: 7).

Reconstruction is needed at a variety of levels touching on individual, cultural, economic, political, ecclesiastical and theological aspects (Mugambi 1995:17). A comment made regarding Mugambi's linking of liberation and reconstruction throws light on the way in which he fluctuates between liberation and reconstruction:

Mugambi reiterates that liberation and reconstruction are consecutive and complementary processes that may both be valid, depending on the specific context. Where liberation has been achieved, the task of reconstruction begins. Where liberation is only partially achieved, reconstruction is only possible in the liberated zones – which provide a basis to support the struggle for liberation on the frontline (Conradie 2006: 8)

Mugambi sees a strong link between the biblical texts of Ezra-Nehemiah and the teachings of Jesus. In his writings he draws the relevance of the biblical texts for reconstruction in African society to an obvious conclusion. The rebuilding of Jerusalem is put forward as the model for the reconstruction of African societies that have been devastated by colonial rule and exploitation.

7.2.2. Ownership of goods

In his theology of reconstruction Mugambi does not deal explicitly with a theology of possessions but he does constantly refer to a communal model of society that is typically African in orientation (see Mugambi 1997:78). One may identify the following features of his work that are relevant for the ownership of resources in local Christian communities:

- Firstly, the reconstruction of society is only possible through the redistribution of land, the means of production and other resources. This can be done through the state in the form of taxation, expropriation and incentives. The role of the church in this regard is to advocate for processes of societal transformation. There is some ambivalence in Mugambi's own writings on whether such redistribution should imply communal ownership of resources or not. In his earlier work (Mugambi 1989) he expresses much appreciation for traditional African societies and their ways of allocating resources (the means of economic

¹² In this respect Mugambi's position is similar to that of Villa-Vicencio who draws on a number of disciplines in his publication that will be analysed in the next sub-section examining Villa-Vicencio.

production) on the basis of communal ownership. Mugambi seems to suggest that, while this is not equally possible in an urban context, such communal ownership remains a possibility in rural communities. His comment with regard to the process of industrialisation points to such a communal ownership of goods:

A few people tend to do too much, while the majority do too little. Correspondingly there is a great difference between the lowest and the highest incomes. Those who are highly paid have to support large extended families, and their commitment to this social fabric often interferes with the demands and expectations at work (Mugambi 1997:79).

- Secondly, he concludes that in African society the family should be the basic unit and this also points to the understanding of communal ownership that he holds to. Nevertheless, in his recognition of the irreversible processes of industrialisation and urbanisation he does indicate that other forms of (private) ownership are necessary, especially in an urban context. He sees the individualism that derives from the influence of consumerism in urban society as constituting a moral plague in Africa. This leads to selfishness and individuals being unwilling to share possessions and resources. A cohesive society cannot be built on individualism.
- Thirdly, Mugambi is torn between the realities of a partly industrialised Africa with its concomitant problems and the communality of traditional African culture and how these two very different approaches may be reconciled. Individualism causes him to seek ways in which a responsible communal understanding of ownership can be introduced, even though he realises the reality of capitalistic consumerism that prevails in much of African society (see Mugambi 2005:55). Mugambi criticises African society in general for giving the impression that material prosperity is only possible through corruption and exploitation. He does not label material wealth as evil in itself, but is concerned that it often makes those who have it into exploiters and oppressors in order for them to gain more:

It seems that mass material poverty today is the direct consequence of exploitation and oppression, while persecution is the fate of those who struggle against such injustices. Righteousness – the virtue of right thought and right action – is opposed to all evil, including exploitation and oppression (Mugambi 1989:98).

Mugambi is also critical of wealthy people who allow their material possessions to become a stumbling block to what he refers to as “their righteousness”. Scripture speaks against the rich who exploit their workers and disregard the poor (Mugambi 1989:99).

The dichotomy between those who live in urban industrialised communities in a Western capitalist context, and the many in rural communities who live in dependence upon their neighbours, lies at the root of the struggle Mugambi has in arriving at a workable model for reconstruction. This typically African situation (although many would say it prevails in most third world countries) makes some measure of compromise necessary in order for those who have accumulated much in the way of possessions to be drawn into a relevant way of sharing in order to redress the inequity of African society. It is this relevant way of sharing that Mugambi struggles with and one can only admire his attempts to reconcile the dichotomy. He is concerned that the evidence indicates that the twentieth century will end with a greater gap than ever before between the rich and the poor. There is an unacceptable gap between the powerful and the powerless, between the affluent and the destitute (Mugambi 2005:45).¹³

In summarising the above points it may be concluded that Mugambi favours African communality with an understanding of the need for people to be responsible for every possession to be considered as ultimately belonging to God. This brings a concomitant responsibility for the individual to hold all things as if another's property. Along with this Mugambi displays a healthy realism about African economic realities that precludes the exercise of a form of socialism that would render the producers of wealth impotent. Those who have possessions need to retain ownership of them but he also urges state, church and business to become involved in meeting the needs of poverty as well as to use pressure to produce a greater sharing of those possessions.

7.2.3. Stewardship of Possessions

Mugambi makes a comment that is indicative of his notion of stewardship, namely that stewardship means living within our means (Mugambi 2005:52). Such a comment is contrary to the pressure on individuals in a consumer society where the emphasis is on using credit in order to purchase what the person desires.

The reality of a capitalist world is that those who have the capital to invest and resources to utilise get ever richer while those who lack capital become ever poorer. Mugambi's view of the Kingdom of God, as he understands it to have been taught by Jesus, points to the need for a new social order to be created in which a person's worth is not determined by the material property he possesses (Mugambi 1989:99). He argues that there is a demand for society to be reconstructed contained in the gospel where the innate selfishness of people, compounded by capitalistic individualism and consumerism, is changed by the gospel so that:

¹³ This is in line with the argument offered by Benezet Bujo (see the previous chapter).

Those people who are endowed with material wealth share it freely and willingly with those less wealthy; and those with other non-material endowments also share whatever they have with their fellow men and women. In this way a new harmonious society is created in which economic, social, cultural, religious and racial distinctions exist but are rendered insignificant by the strong bond of universal brotherhood. This new society – the Kingdom of God – is beyond the parochialism and pettiness of ideologies that serve the selfish interests of only some segments of the human race (Mugambi 1989:99).

In the light of this projection of the Kingdom, he sees a special need for leaders to manage private and public resources responsibly. In this context he categorises private and public resources as follows:

Private resources include the time, knowledge, skill and the experience at the disposal of every individual. Public resources include the totality of all natural, cultural, social and human possessions of a people (Mugambi 2005:62).

His contention is that because Western capitalism emphasises private resources it has little understanding of the common humanity of all people and of the responsible use of public resources in order to ensure the well being of all. Mugambi is particularly concerned with resources being irresponsibly used and the selfish use and the mismanagement of such resources that results in the social inequalities of colonialism being perpetuated.

Mugambi's perspective is that those theologians who insist that the Kingdom of God is to be regarded as a future event are perpetuating the acceptance of ungodly structures by oppressed people. He maintains that the teachings of Jesus call for us to live here and now as part of a new creation in accordance with the precepts of this Kingdom. Such an approach to ownership would seek for responsible stewardship that recognises the need for provisions to be shared because such provisions are God given.

Is this a utopian dream or a realistic hope? I think it is a realistic hope that the human race is capable of realizing, if only we could suppress our own temptations towards greed, power and apathy; if only we could replace the law of the jungle with the law of God, imbued with righteousness (Mugambi 1989:100).

The dominant emphasis of a theology of reconstruction is thus on the responsible utilisation of resources in such a way that those who are poor and marginalised receive their fair share of such resources and that those resources are used in the interest of the well-being of communities and not simply in the interest of the accumulation of private resources for the individual. Mugambi sees part of the answer to be in the development of small, manageable communities that will facilitate amenities being shared, the possibility of growing food for themselves and the development of co-responsibility. In this approach one can see how African communality has influenced his thinking. This approach limits the size to which a community is allowed to grow in

order to enhance communality.

I have offered the above summary in order to establish that Mugambi, in his argument, calls for of all areas of African society to be restructured. He refers to church and social and economic structures as suffering from the imposition of Western cultural norms which have not helped to construct a viable post-colonial African economy and calls for Africa to be set free to be African. His notion of stewardship calls for available resources to be more responsibly shared in order to bring about a measure of equity that would be seen in that no one experiences extreme lack. Behind Mugambi's perspective of the desired future for African society lies a desire to see the introduction of the Jubilee with its subsequent restoration of goods and resources which will result in poverty being eradicated and all people enabled to live with dignity, having sufficient to meet their needs.

7.2.4. Stewarding resources in the local church

Much of what Mugambi says is not relevant for the ownership and stewardship of the local church community's own possessions. What he does, is to emphasize the prophetic responsibility of the national / ecumenical church. From what he says in this regard it may be derived that the ownership of resources by an institution, such as the local church, should be regarded as an example of communal ownership and that such resources should be available to all the members of the local church. His main emphasis is on the allocation and use of such resources being done in a responsible way. He suggests that the local church has an obligation to serve the needs of the local community (and not only its own ecclesial purposes) through the ways in which its resources are managed. He is also critical of the church as a social institution as he maintains that the church has charge of huge natural, cultural, human and financial resources that are often mismanaged, or poorly managed. His figures for the effective (or ineffective) distribution of resources channelled through non-governmental agencies, including the church, are that only 10% of what is received is actually distributed (see Mugambi 2005:57). Aligned with this is his criticism of the way in which missionary societies have judged Africans as being incapable of making decisions about the assets of the local church. He maintains that by maintaining control in the hands of the missionaries the message given out is that Africans are incapable (Mugambi 1997:91). The results are contrary to what should be expected from the local church as an expression of the proper use of allocated resources. In dealing with poverty and the church becoming an example of a new society he makes the following point:

In that society everyone will be poor, because no one will lord himself over others. In another sense, everyone will be rich, because each person will share his endowments with others, without exploitation (Mugambi 1989:100).

Ideally, this will be reflected by the stewardship of resources in a family or tribal (communal) context. Mugambi himself understands this to be the goal towards which the church needs to be working but has not yet achieved. Therefore those who make up the church should seek after righteousness today and identify and work in solidarity with the suffering and the oppressed in contemporary society (Mugambi 1989:102). Whatever gifts and talents there are should be utilised in this direction for the sake of creating a Kingdom of God culture. He is also emphatic that the church should be united and calls for churches to set aside differences for the sake of the Kingdom and its projected impact upon African society. He refers to the unity of churches in an area as expressions of the African sense of community (Mugambi 1995:198).¹⁴ These guidelines should be applicable to all churches and church related agencies as well. Mugambi places a large responsibility on the church and its agencies to use their resources with care and a sense of accountability.

Mugambi thus calls for the church to become the practical expression of Jesus' teaching about caring and providing for the poor and oppressed and, as such, become the exemplar to every society in which the church exists. He calls for society to return to smaller, more communal units, in which the communality that exists in rural African society can be practiced. This provides the sort of context where the culture of the Kingdom of God can best be put into practice. Mugambi points out that the formation of this type of society should be the joint responsibility of the church along with local and national governments. The objective is the formation of a restructured society in which wealth is redistributed and better provision made for the poor.¹⁵ He further issues a strong call for the church to return to being assertively involved in social action and acts of compassion, thus playing a much more prophetic role in society.

7.2.5. Summary

Mugambi's theology of reconstruction suggests a theology of possessions in which the following is emphasised:

- Economic resources should be fairly distributed. In calling for such redistribution he criticises all aspects of society, including the church, for being far too concerned with a consumerist attitude to possessions while ignoring those who are in need. Africans should

¹⁴ In this call he is guided by the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) that challenges us all to make optimum use of the resources and opportunities at our disposal.

¹⁵ The application of this very policy is being undertaken, albeit to a limited extent, by the government in South Africa as it focuses on the poor and needy and previously oppressed.

take on greater responsibility for governance in church and society.

- The ownership of resources by the local church as an institution may be used to contribute to the maintenance of an African tradition of communal ownership. In putting this point forward Mugambi recognises that there is no prospect of returning to pre-colonial African culture and, therefore, African communalism is not the sole answer.
- African societies need to be reconstructed in the face of current societal processes. The management of such resources can only be regarded as being responsible if it serves the needs of the local community (and not only the church as an institution). This management can, in turn, only be achieved in the context of a reconstructed society that displays liberation from political and economic repression.

7.3. Charles Villa-Vicencio

Charles Villa-Vicencio was Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation that is based in Cape Town. He was formerly the National Research Director in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and has published over one hundred scholarly articles and authored and edited eighteen books. A regular contributor to debate in South Africa, his present work is largely in the area of transitional justice. He works closely with universities and research institutes in other parts of Africa as well as all over the world.

Villa-Vicencio's work *Reconstruction Theology*, birthed at the beginning of the new democracy in South Africa and written about the struggle of the new government to develop an equitable social structure where the poor are catered for without destroying the wealth generating capacity of the rich, is the main source for this next section.

7.3.1. Reconstruction in Villa-Vicencio

His own description of reconstruction theology serves as a good starting place for this research into his approach to possessions:

A theology of reconstruction is pre-eminently a contextual theology. It explicitly addresses the present needs of a particular society (Villa-Vicencio 1992:41).

He refers to the ethic of reconstruction that is needed to place certain strategic values and structures in position in order to begin the process of social renewal. Villa-Vicencio has, over a period of time, moved from a position of liberation theology to embrace the need for more constructive societal change. It is this societal change which forms much of the content of his book in which he focuses on a wide spectrum of disciplines including economics, ethics, human rights, politics and theology. His concept of reconstruction involves what he terms nation

building, and he feels the church's contribution to such reconstruction has been insufficient. Out of this perspective he questions whether the church is capable of making a meaningful contribution to good government, asking whether the task would not be better handled by secular forces (Villa-Vicencio 1992:23). His book, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, is foundational to examining his approach to the ownership and stewardship of possessions. This book is filled with interesting concepts but I have restricted my examination to the two chapters that I regard as the most relevant, namely, "Transcending individualism and collectivism: A theological contribution", and "Theology and political economy". I also make reference to an article he wrote in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* entitled, "Liberation and Reconstruction". This article confirms his move away from liberation theology as is also reflected in the following quote from his earlier work:

There can be no healing or sense of completion in the health, purpose and security of the individual without the restoration of entire community (Villa-Vicencio 1992:166).

This quote expresses the extent of his call for radical change in the structure of African society. His position may be applied in colonial as in post-colonial Africa because much of the injustice of colonialism has been perpetuated in post-colonial Africa. All sectors of African society are in need of being overhauled and the church, in particular, has a formative role to play in setting such an example in that society as will offer an incentive to change.

7.3.2. Ownership of possessions

His approach to material possessions is expressed in his description of the message that the Bible directs at those who refuse to share with their fellows. The call upon them is summarised in the following quote:

Being prepared to act against one's own self interest one acquires not only personal fulfilment, but also the satisfaction of one's most essential material and social needs (Villa-Vicencio 1992:161).

He introduces the need for the state to ensure that resources are distributed equitably in order for all people to derive benefit from such distribution. In a subsection entitled, "Ownership and Usage", Villa-Vicencio is emphatic that people need to be involved in the creation of their own future as well as in owning the means of production and having democratic control over the use of land and factories:

This refers to the essential right of the populace to control the way in which the means of production is used, whether owned privately or by the state (Villa-Vicencio 1992:201).

This is a statement with far-reaching repercussions, not least of all with regard to the issue of just

how private the concept of private ownership really is when others may decide on its usage and deployment. The essentials of extreme democracy are contained in this statement and appear to clash with his appeal for the state to control the fair distribution of resources. He refers to papal statements identifying the theological argument stated below:

In favour of a social mortgage of all private property in order that goods may serve the general purpose for which God gave them. John Paul II reiterates this point: if the common good requires it, there should be no hesitation even in expropriation (quoted in Villa–Vicencio 1992:204).

This approach could result in the state being given far-reaching powers to bring such equity into existence. While Villa-Vicencio denies calling for a Marxist type society with all property vested in the State, there does seem to be the semblance of such a system in what he considers to be ownership. He also comments that Calvinism contains values that challenge the individualism of the West and that such values may be used against current positions held in society relating to possessions.

In contemporary debate it (Calvinism) continues to operate as a potentially “dangerous memory” ready to activate the communal and democratic ideals so desperately needed to bridge the chasm between liberal individualism and social collectivism (Villa-Vicencio 1992:146).

Villa-Vicencio sees the possible solution as to be a form of communalism that finds common ground with people in Third World situations where documentation such as the *African Charter on Human and People’s Rights* affirms communalism as the basis for human rights. As has been noted previously, communalism tends toward common ownership as against individual ownership, although this is not as obvious as it would seem as most systems of communality in Africa recognise some right to individual ownership. In this regard he refers to the way in which theology grounds the human rights debate within a personal-communal sense of existence that transcends the divide between western individualism and collectivist notions. This means that he holds the notion that a biblical approach to goods, possessions, the means of production etc. would be an approach including both individual ownership and communal availability and responsibility (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:155). Figures quoted by Villa-Vicencio give some indication of the disparity between rich and poor as well as the extent of that disparity in South Africa. It should be possible to assume that this assessment reflects the general state of the economy in other areas of Africa. This disparity is one of the factors that motivates Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for societal change. He sees that the redistribution of the ownership of land and the means of production are as much needed to remedy the situation of inequality as the need for political change and democratic control being instituted over these factors. The following

comment with regard to ownership is pertinent:

Theologically, the ownership and the use of God's creation is for the benefit and well-being of all God's children, especially those who are at any point in time in most need of empowerment (see Villa-Vicencio 1992: 204).

The problem of obtaining these basic necessities is that they are unevenly distributed. The observation that most of the wealth and the means of production is in the hands of the few means that the majority have to do without the basic necessities of life.

7.3.3. Stewardship

The key word that emerges in Villa-Vicencio's writing is "reciprocity". He understands that the interplay between the individual's needs or successes results in the community benefiting. This reciprocity needs to be promoted in any understanding of stewardship. He applies this concept to the differences in urban and rural areas and calls for the principle of reciprocity to be more strictly applied in order to prevent power and resources being located in the hands of a few to the detriment of the many. He views this centralising of power as sinful (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:172). This concept of reciprocity is also applicable to the management of all resources by any authority or individual. Villa-Vicencio uses the word "economy" with reference to the management of the public household. This includes national and global economics, because he conceives of God's household as being universal. In his observations concerning the need for individualism and collectivism to be transcended, Villa-Vicencio posits a Biblical principal which includes the worth and dignity of the individual, realised in community with others. The conclusion of this notion makes it impossible for the individual stewardship of available resources without the community playing some part in decisions regarding the use of such resources (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:165). This is confirmed in the way he describes the freedom of choice:

Freedom of choice is regarded as realistically obtainable for the majority of the population only if and when the basic requirements of nutrition, housing, health care and basic education are provided (Villa-Vicencio 1992:167).

In all Villa-Vicencio's writings both the individual and the community are considered to be jointly responsible for the management and disbursement of available resources. Villa-Vicencio is critical of the liberal notion that allows acts of mercy and benevolence to be disbursed to people as acts of charity done in isolation from being involved with the person in need. This sort of action isolates the giver from responsibility for the person who is receiving. While this form of charity may be seen as responsible stewardship in some circles, it is actually avoiding personal contact and flies in the face of incarnational ministry to the poor, which would be representative

of true biblical stewardship. This approach may be observed in the way that national and individual resources are badly managed. This notion of personal involvement in ministry to the poor has implications in the light of biblical teaching on the Sabbath and Jubilee years (Leviticus 25) as well as Jesus' teaching about the coming of the Kingdom (Luke 4:18ff.) which teaching includes:

The reclamation of land, economic restructuring, restoring of goods lost and the freeing of the oppressed to share fully in society (Villa-Vicencio 1992:219).

Villa Vicencio also maintains that all Christian theology should be developed within the context of community. The role of the economy needs to be bound up in how people co-exist. There should be a quest for an economy that promotes the welfare of all, especially the poor, through democratic channels. In using the term "democratic channels", Villa-Vicencio is referring to workers being involved in the process of making decisions. Villa-Vicencio acknowledges the need for those who produce wealth to be retained, but calls for them to show greater responsibility towards those who lack wealth in order to give them an equitable share in the good things of life.

His approach could be expressed as combining a realistic understanding of the economic circumstances prevailing in Africa with a liberal approach to the responsibility of the individual towards the group, whether the group is the family, the clan, the church or the nation.

7.3.4. Role of the local church

Villa-Vicencio seeks to develop a new vision of humanity (Villa-Vicencio 1992:164). He contends that a theological-ethical study of human rights must result in a vision of what society can become. This, therefore, impacts the role the church is called upon to play so that it provides such vision by developing a model for society to observe and imitate. Presenting this vision will challenge the status quo to reach out toward change. The presenting of this vision is the task of the church as it seeks to apply the truths of the bible to the circumstances of a changing society. The vision desired is essentially what Villa-Vicencio describes as a communal vision (Villa-Vicencio 1992:164), although he does not call for a return to traditional African communality. The message of the Bible provides an alternative to both systems that have failed, i.e. Western individualistic capitalism and ideological Marxism with its perceptions of collectivism. In the following quote he expresses his belief that the biblical message holds the real answers:

The message contained in the biblical vision of society is a message concerning the individual worth and dignity of all people realised in community with others. More specifically, it is a heritage grounded in the story of people who are the focus of God's special care, despite their lowly and despised status in the world – whether they

be slaves in Egypt, the poor in Israel, widows, orphans, the sick or the oppressed of society (Villa-Vicencio 1992:165).

Communality includes the need to protect the individual from exploitation. Further to the protecting of the individual, Villa-Vicencio's emphasis on limiting the role of the state (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:170) is followed by a description of African communality that he sees as an answer to western individualism and state intervention:

The extended family unit and village membership function as an intermediary between the individual and the state (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 172).

The metaphors of "the body of Christ" and "the community of God's people" call for this relationship to express itself in the mutual care and strengthening of one another. Acceptance of the teaching of Galatians 3:28 (the oneness of the people of God) should bring all people to accept belonging as one of the essential needs of all human beings (Villa-Vicencio 1992:175). This perspective describes how human relations should operate in the local church. All through this publication, Villa-Vicencio is focussed on mutual responsibility and the desire for all people to have the basic necessities of the good life. Once again he lays out his answer to the problems inherent in societal structure in the African context. He is clear that there is no exact form for reconstructions to take but sees that the bible requires structures to be developed under the inspiration of the biblical vision. This development should take place within the local context, according to the specific needs of that context, and should be expressed by the local church. The notion that the biblical vision is central to restoration being effective remains a prime value in his theology of reconstruction (Villa-Vicencio 1992:220), reflecting values obtained during his involvement in liberation theology. In line with the teaching of the Bible this principle calls for joyous sharing in the restoration of the covenantal basis for a genuine human community of liberty and equality (Villa-Vicencio 1992:220). His conclusion is worth noting:

It has to do with the emancipation from servitude and dehumanising dependency, which involves economic reconstruction and a sense of communal belonging. This is what, from a theological perspective, gives socialism a certain instinctive appeal – with the insistence that it includes the democratic right of people to share in the shaping of their own future. Theological realism further demands that an economy be efficient and effective as a basis from which each is realistically able to receive and to which each is able to contribute (Villa-Vicencio 1992:220).

Villa-Vicencio does not ask that the church should give an alternative to capitalism and socialism. What he does maintain is that the task of the church is:

To subject economic systems to the demands of the gospel which affirms the dignity of all people and their obligation to work for a more just social order (Villa-Vicencio 1992:232).

When he puts forward initiatives that need to be taken, Villa-Vicencio, dealing specifically with the South African context, puts forward a number of pointers that could be applicable to the rest of Africa as well.

1. A strong vibrant economy is necessary for the poor to be empowered (through redistribution).
2. He denotes the church's bias in favour of the poor necessitates that they be included in a market economy alongside those who own or dominate the means of production.
3. The church would need to provide moral support for the process of renationalising those sectors that had been privatised.
4. A theological concern for the well-being of the poor requires that key sectors of the economy be relocated in the hands of the state, joint-ownership schemes or broad spectrums of shareholders, as a means of the wealth of the nation being redistributed to achieve maximum benefit for those least advantaged. Alternatively, present ownership of the means of production needs to serve the interest of the poor.
5. The control of the economy by white conglomerates needs to be broken to allow for more people to participate in such an economy.
6. The church needs to support the generation of funds to redress the unequal distribution of resources that presently exists.
7. Infrastructures and services in rural areas need to be upgraded.

The goal to recognise the need for all people to realise their full human potential through being able to participate in all facets of life, the democratisation of the economy aimed at promoting a shared solution to the economic challenges of reconstruction, is ultimately a theological priority (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:248).

7.3.5. Summary

Villa-Vicencio understands reconstruction to involve economic justice as well as poor people being spiritually and materially empowered. Because different contexts require different approaches to reconstruction there can be no positing of a single panacea. He mentions four historic shifts that have taken place globally that affect any approach to finding solutions to the problems of poverty and oppression:

1. The failure of the economic and political structures of Europe (mainly Eastern Europe).
2. Widespread belief in Utopian socialist ideals in Third World countries has collapsed
3. The failure of Western based capitalism to meet the needs of the poor.
4. A newfound appreciation that even under the most adverse conditions, the poor rise in rebellion to demand their rights (see Villa-Vicencio 2006: 163).

Villa-Vicencio gives eight pointers as an economic alternative to capitalism and socialism. Much of this is contained in previous sections. He completes this list with an observation that encapsulates his approach to the whole subject of materialism and consumerism as it affects Africa: An economy that is driven by profit alone requires the strongest theological critique (Villa-Vicencio 2006:167).

Villa-Vicencio points to the way in which many in the third world still look to socialist ideals as the answer to the woes of Africa. However, his concern is that Christianity has also failed because it has spiritualised the message of Jesus¹⁶ to the point of leaving a shocking disproportion between the ideal that brought Christianity into existence and the results that have been produced (Villa-Vicencio 1992:226). The failure to eliminate the disparity between word and deed has not had the impact on the conscience of Christians that it should have had. The church seems to find theory to be sufficient without the end product validating such theory. Nevertheless, in spite of the shortcomings of Christianity, Villa-Vicencio still judges the Marxist understanding of humanity as inadequate and does not see the solution as lying there. He remarks on the survival of capitalism despite its shortcomings, gross injustices and exploitation of the poor as being significant for its application to Africa. His radical approach to the message of the Kingdom of God and the concerns expressed in the teachings of Jesus has led him to an inclusive approach to all the different facets of life concerning material things. His approach encompasses a national reconstructing that includes jobs, houses, healthcare, education and democratic structures that empower people. He terms this to be an organic, people-based spirituality (Villa-Vicencio 2006:168), offering the possibility of the communality of life and spirituality uniting, synthesising and bringing difference into creative harmony (Villa-Vicencio 2006:168). He also affirms an African sense of communality:

¹⁶ Mugambi makes the same point.

Traditional understandings of *ubuntu* affirm the organic wholeness of humanity – wholeness realised in and through other people. An African sense of community *includes* and *unites* (Villa-Vicencio 2006:169).

This leads to the understanding that possessions are both individually and communally owned, depending on the needs facing the community and the individual's current ability to meet such needs. This expresses his interpretation of the teachings of the Bible. His conclusion is, however, that the church has failed to provide a format in which this kind of unity can find itself and he calls for the bold pursuit of systematic reflection and structural change that will provide for such a format.

Unlike Mugambi, who fluctuates between African communality and the reconstruction of society that is mainly to be achieved through the church's example and influence, Villa-Vicencio's approach is far more radical. He calls for all strata of society, including the ecclesial, civil and economic sectors, to become involved in a joint effort to foster change. The two theologians, having parted company with liberal theology, nevertheless carry some of the concepts of liberation with them in their theology of reconstruction, Mugambi to a lesser extent than Villa-Vicencio. Communality looms as large in Mugambi's thinking as in that of Villa-Vicencio but the latter leans towards established authorities being much more pro-actively involved in developing a more equitable social construct, as he assesses that they would be more effective than the church. Both theologians express disapproval of *laissez fair* capitalism but also find socialist notions of ownership unacceptable. This means that they opt for a complex development where individual, communal and state controlled ownership of property and possessions and the means of production are combined. In this mix the state retains the right to interfere wherever inequity is found in order to rectify such a situation. This may sound inefficient and impossible to achieve but their response to such criticism would be to point out that different approaches are needed for different contexts.

7.4. Barend (Bennie) Van der Walt

Barend Johannes (Bennie) Van der Walt was born on 12 April 1939 in Potchefstroom, South Africa. From 1970 - 1974 he was senior lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Fort Hare; from 1975 to 1999 director of the Institute for Reformational Studies at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and since 1980 he was also professor of Philosophy at the same university. He retired in 2002. He has the advantage of being an elder in a Tswana speaking congregation established in a rural area. He expresses himself on a variety of topics including economics, ethics and African and Western worldviews.

In his book, *Understanding and Rebuilding Africa*, Van der Walt deals with subjects such as stewardship and economics. It is from these categories that I derive his approach to reconstruction and the stewardship of possessions. While he does not describe himself as a reconstruction theologian, there is nevertheless a strong element in Reformed theology calling for reconstruction in all areas of society. This element would be represented by theologians such as Cornelius von Til and Rousas John Rushdooney, reconstruction theologians favouring the structure for society that prevailed in Geneva in Calvin's time. This is not to place Van der Walt in the circle described above but to show that there is attention given to this topic in Reformed circles.

7.4.1. Reconstruction

Two quotes that Van der Walt makes from well known authors suffice to set the stage for his thinking and, following these quotes, I examine his perspectives on economic life as it projects a notion of possessions which is applicable to the individual and the church.

The purpose of man's life cannot be the unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then cheerfully to get the most out of them. How did the West decline from its triumphal march to its present sickness? The mistake must be at the root, at the very basis of human thinking in the past centuries, and could be defined as humanistic autonomy, the proclaimed and enforced autonomy of man from a higher force above him. It based modern civilisation on the dangerous need to worship man and his material needs (Soltshenitsyn quoted in Van der Walt 2003:461).

I loathe capitalism because it gives far too great play to our inherent selfishness. We are told to be highly competitive and our children start learning the attitude of the rat race quite early. They mustn't just do well at school – they must sweep the floor with their rivals. That's how you get on. We give prizes to such persons, not so far as I know to those who know how best to get on with others or those who can coax the best out of others. We must delight in our ulcers, the symbols of our success. Capitalism has a morality that belongs properly to the jungle – the survival of the fittest; the weakest to the wall and the devil take the hindmost. I long for a society that is not so grasping, not ruled by the rat race, but one in which there is more sharing. I deplore the kind of society which is uncaring and selfish, and hope that we will work for a society that is more compassionate and caring, and values people, not because they are consumers and producers, but because they are of infinite value, since they are created in the image of God (Tutu as quoted in Van der Walt 2003:461).

These quotes indicate that Van der Walt seeks a new society that will be established on what he sees as biblical norms, in which nobody lacks and nobody lives in excess. The above quotes also indicate his approach to possessions.

7.4.2. Ownership and stewardship

Van der Walt points out that it is by the grace of God that we are able to create wealth and we

therefore cannot simply understand our accumulation of such wealth as being the result of our own efforts. This notion of co-production leads him to an understanding of co-ownership with God that is reflected throughout his work. In his critique of globalisation and a new trend towards what he calls “globalism”, Van der Walt points out that only the rich benefit under current systems. In developing a Christian paradigm for economic practice he arrives at a number of pointers that I have summarised in order to highlight his view regarding reconstruction and its impact upon a theology of possessions. The following are what he refers to as flashes:

- 1) In the first place the concept of stewardship cuts off at the root the idea that we are owners of creation and all its wealth.
- 2) The fact that we are not owners does not mean, as so many people reason, that we have less responsibility.
- 3) Stewardship demands of us that we cultivate God’s creation so that it will come to fruition and flower in all fields, including the economic area.
- 4) Cultivation goes hand in hand with care for the creation of God.
- 5) In addition to this, stewardship entails that a careful distinction should be made between real needs and mere desires.
- 6) A limited use for own needs and help to others in need should be emphasised.
- 7) It has already become clear that our stewardship in the economic field is not only concerned with the gathering of possessions, but also with relationships among people.¹⁷

These flashes show that Van der Walt has a strong emphasis on mutual responsibility that precludes the concept of purely private ownership. Van der Walt’s position is that, because there is no neutral economic thought and practice, the tendency of people towards self-interest rather than responsible stewardship should be noted. Because of this bias there is a problem with most economic systems today in that profit and prosperity, both of which are not inherently bad, are put into a central position. This leads to the profit motive becoming an idol and self interest a norm. Another way of putting it would be to say that in most economies today, the end justifies the means, the end being the production of profit (Van der Walt 2003:462). Some of this thinking has been eroded in recent times by a growing social awareness in business circles and has produced a minimal acknowledgement by Van der Walt that:

¹⁷ For a more in depth examination of these “flashes” see Van der Walt 2003: 464-466.

The company, apart from its primary role of making money, also has a social responsibility. This is a mere afterthought, however, and the normative corrections applied in this way are very limited (Van der Walt 2003:464).

It is clear to Van der Walt that stewardship means service to our neighbour. This is not reflected in current business practice where a definition of business could be, “workplaces where efficient means of production are forged together in order to make a profit in the marketplace” (Van der Walt 2003:466). Van der Walt would describe a more acceptable definition of stewardship as, “a community of workers and shareholders (employers) who serve each other and the public (consumers) through available means” (Van der Walt 2003:467).

Most of the historic patterns of economy that have developed portray a dualistic approach (a separation of religious and secular life). Van der Walt has a holistic view of life and calls for an approach that transcends the individual and his salvation. This means that the will of God need to be applied to both state and culture. He calls for the development of a biblically reformed worldview that recognises the worth of each individual as a part of the community (Van der Walt 2003:541). African communalism and Western individualism both claim to have the answers to the dilemma of Africa, and many of the theologians examined in the previous chapters have opted for one or the other, more often seeing communalism as the way forward. According to Van der Walt any “ism”, such as communalism and individualism, makes an absolute of something good in God’s creation. In spite of their beautiful aspects, both of them are distortions – also from a biblical perspective. Being aware of this is important, because many Western Christians try to prove their individualistic perspective from the Bible. Other Christians, however, frustrated by Western individualism and its consequences (loneliness, estrangement and the falling apart of marriages and families), regard communalism as a biblical remedy to the way an individualistic way of life dehumanises people (Van der Walt 2003:155). He opts for a third way in which he applies the concept of a biblical worldview (Van der Walt 2003:155). Regarding this worldview he expresses community in the following way:

Individuality and communality are complementary facets of multi-dimensional man; both to be developed to enhance individual and community (Van der Walt 2003:128).

In this approach he wants people to be viewed in a multi-dimensional anthropology as well, thus wanting all the different aspects of being human to be developed in a balanced way.

7.4.3. Role of local church

For Van der Walt a biblical worldview encompasses that individuality and communality indicate that there is both a communal and an individual responsibility before God. Van der Walt follows

the Reformed understanding of the role of the church, which expects the church to play a far greater role in society than would be sought for by most evangelical groups. It may be assumed that Van der Walt holds the view that a form of government could be derived from scripture that would solve the dilemma of Africa through the church's demonstrating and calling for secular society to follow that form of government.

It is clear that Van der Walt also has an approach to the reconstruction of society which would embrace both the responsibility of the individual to further himself and accumulate wealth and possessions, as well as the responsibility of the community to look after those individuals within it that are suffering through being poor, sick, down-trodden or deprived. He holds the view that government needs to operate in a far more biblical way as far as distribution and empowerment are concerned. This demands a combination of frugality and the accumulation of wealth as well as responsibility for those in need. As regards the notion of possessions one could say that his approach is towards responsible stewardship that recognises God's ownership of all creation and its resources, combined with a right attitude towards the poor. He also has a very high notion of the role of the church, especially in fulfilling a prophetic and exemplary role. It is difficult to separate the roles of church and state in Van der Walt's reasoning because he sees the church as an essential player in ensuring right governance by the state.

7.5. Conclusion

According to Maluleke, the theologies of inculturation and liberation responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage that no longer obtains in most African nations, and that this has caused both Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi to call for the a pro-active theology of reconstruction to be installed (Maluleke 1997:22). Maluleke is fairly critical of both these theologians, especially of what he sees as their tendency to disparage inculturation and liberation theologies. He differentiates between Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi in that he analyses Mugambi as issuing a call for innovative transcendence of both inculturation and liberation and Villa-Vicencio as appealing for post cold-war (African) theology to engage in serious dialogue with democracy, human rights, law-making, nation building, and economics in order to ensure that these do indeed improve the quality of human lives (see Maluleke 1997:22).

The theologians I have examined in this chapter have clear convictions and come to similar conclusions. They see the need for African society to return to some form of communality and call for of social and political systems to be restructured so as to give the poor and oppressed a greater, more democratic, say in the ownership and use of natural resources and the means of

production. They call for the church to fulfil the role of conscience and to demonstrate biblical norms and values. They call for theologians to derive an economy that will bring the strengths of capitalism and socialism together in a way that expresses a biblical concern for the poor and oppressed. They call for a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources with workers being given a greater say in the distribution of profits. Their approach recognises that all people are inter-related and militates against wealth being accumulated for the sake of power. These theologians stand together in condemning the consumerist aspect of Western capitalism and call for redistribution in line with the Jubilee. They expect governments, as stewards responsible to the people, to be involved in redistributing possessions so as to establish a more just and equitable society.

The role of the church in all of this could be categorised as that of having a prophetic voice bringing critique as well as offering God's concerns and directives for change. This involves the church in setting forth an example of equity in its own dealings with possessions as well as calling for existing legislation to be restructured to further the lot of the poor until a biblical norm can be realised.

This particular approach, expressed in the writings of the reconstruction theologians, to the handling of possessions, shows a realistic attitude toward the problems endemic in the African church and societal context. The need for structural change before there can be a proper solution to the problems created by colonialism, such as the lack of possessions and the basic necessities for reasonable, life is realistic and points at one of the main hindrances to the empowerment of the poor. Further, there is a realistic assessment of the role the church can play with regard to bringing a change in attitude toward the poor and the stewardship of resources and possessions within the church. An added positive in their approach is the recognition that all spheres of society need to be involved in facilitating this change and so there is a consequent need for the whole of society to be responsible to work together towards greater equity.



Chapter 8

From poverty to prosperity: a theology of possessions in the New Pentecostal Churches

8.1. Introduction

I have previously alluded to the impact of the Pentecostal churches on the African church scene in chapter 2. However, the importance of this influence demands a more in depth examination of what is an invasion of consumerism into the African church. It is such an examination that I offer in this chapter.

Pentecostal Christianity has emerged as a major player in the African church. Pentecostals are assessed to be the fastest growing movement within Christianity today with almost 500 million

adherents' worldwide (Barrett 1997:25)

This movement has seen its greatest increase in Sub-Saharan Africa and South America (Anderson 1999:4). Although this thesis is concerned essentially with the study of African theologies, and Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity originating mainly in North America, it needs to be noted that this movement has its roots in Africa and has gained a large following on this continent.

Rudolf Otto differentiates between what he terms the non-rational aspect of Christianity and the one-sided intellectualistic approach to Christianity adopted by many Western churches. This assessment could be said to describe the difference between the experiential focus of the Pentecostal churches and the more informational / academic approach of the main line denominations. Osamoah-Gyadu (2005:397) understands Pentecostalism with its experiential emphasis to be a response to the cerebrally formal Christianity expressed in the majority of the established churches.

The influence of Pentecostalism in Africa is relevant because of the so-called prosperity gospel and the emphasis on the ownership of possessions embedded in that gospel, which is often associated with Pentecostalism. Furthermore, the focus in the prosperity gospel movement is largely on the individual and goes contrary to the general trend among theologians in Africa that is towards a revival of African communality. Because of its emphasis on deliverance as a means to upward mobility and social advancement the message of this segment of the church is particularly attractive to the poor and deprived as it offers a quick release from their adverse circumstances. Together with the emphasis on experience (a significant part of African religion!) this, along with the promise of material gain, may be seen as the main factor contributing to the rapid growth of such Pentecostal churches.

Anderson identifies three distinct types of Pentecostalism in Africa that have differing approaches to the stewardship of possessions:

- Pentecostal Mission churches, so called because of their origin in predominantly White mission churches, also sometimes known as Classical Pentecostal churches. Such churches typically adopt a more frugal approach to possessions while still recognising the individual's right to ownership of such possessions.
- Independent Pentecostal churches which have exclusively black leaderships and are independent of white control. Such churches operate with a greater emphasis on a charismatic /

prophetic leading figure that is expected to accumulate possessions in order to be seen as a prosperous representative of the whole group.

- Indigenous Pentecostal-type churches, also known as Spirit-type churches or Zionist type churches, belonging to the more general category of African Independent churches, and including, amongst others, indigenous churches that have the words “Zion” or “Apostolic” included in their names. (Anderson 1992:7).

To the above three categories would need to be added those Pentecostal churches that have been influenced by the health and prosperity movement originating in a section of the American Pentecostal church. Such churches are referred to in this chapter as New Pentecostal churches. The last forty years have seen an increase in the influence of the gospel of prosperity. Such churches place great emphasis on the accumulation and display of possessions as the evidence of God’s blessing.

Typical of this last approach to Christianity would be American names such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Jim Bakker, Kenneth Copeland, Robert Schuller and many more. As it is beyond the scope of this thesis to expand on the American roots of this teaching, Gifford’s short description of the teaching will suffice:

This gospel holds that material prosperity is the right of every true Christian. Its advocates insist that anything spent in the Lord’s service will bring a rich return: this is called the “law of increase” or the “law of sowing” (Gifford 1988:19 & 20) (see also Farah 1978:115 – 164).

Anderson criticises such Pentecostal churches for propagating a prosperity gospel which reproduces some of the worst forms of capitalism in a Christian guise (Anderson 2000:11).

Local churches based in South Africa, commonly referred to as faith churches that preach such a gospel of prosperity and are linked to the United States churches, would include the churches operating under the IFCC (International Fellowship of Christian Churches) (Gifford 1988:36).

The criticism of this prosperity teaching could be summed up in the words of Anderson:

A criticism often justifiably levelled at Pentecostals is that they have sometimes expounded a theology of success and power at the expense of a theology of the cross. There are not always instant solutions to life’s vicissitudes, and spirituality is not to be measured in terms of success (Anderson 2006:4).

Anderson argues that the teaching of the New Pentecostal Churches suggests that by adopting certain methods, such as sowing seed faith by tithing and giving offerings, a practice based upon 2 Corinthians 9:6-11, success and prosperity are assured and that wealth is the evidence of God’s favour upon a person. As has been quoted above, he also expresses the commonly held criticism

that the New Pentecostal movement neglects a theology of the cross.¹⁸ In this particular chapter I offer an assessment of the position and influence of the Pentecostal churches on a theology of possessions in the African church with the focus being particularly on the New Pentecostal churches. This subject is difficult as there is a paucity of literature in New Pentecostal church circles in Africa. Much has been written from a Western perspective, particularly within the context of American Pentecostal churches and I allude to some of those writings in this chapter. Such writings would include Karla Poewe's *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (1994), Walter Hollenweger's *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (1997), Murray Dempster's *The Globalisation of Pentecostalism* (1999) and more.

Contributions from within the African context include Alan Anderson's *African Reformation* (2001), Paul Gifford's *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (1998), Ogbu Kalu's *Power, Poverty and Prayer* (2001), Ogbu Kalu's (ed.) *African Christianity: an African Story* (2005) and Corten and Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost* (2001).

The body of literature from which I draw my conclusions consists mainly of critical writings regarding the approach of the New Pentecostal churches to the subject of prosperity and material possessions. To this end I examine five contributors to the debate. One of these contributors, namely Allan Anderson, is sympathetic to such Pentecostal churches, while two others, namely Asamoah-Gyadu and Musa A.B. Gaiya, write from an established church perspective. A highly critical article by Annsi-Simjoki also comes from an established church perspective while yet another contribution comes from an anthropological/ theological researcher, Birgit Meyer. I also draw on an article by Mary Getui in which she examines the inroads made into African culture through the influence of global materialism and how this is reflected in the teachings of such New Pentecostal churches.

In the discussion below I discuss the views of these authors regarding the Pentecostal churches on which they focus. I focus specifically on the following: 1) the approach of these churches to prosperity, 2) their understanding of ownership, 3) the extent to which stewardship is a part of their practices, 4) how the local church is and should be handling their possessions. On this basis I will offer an analysis of the theology on possessions within New Pentecostal churches.

8.2. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

¹⁸ This is essentially a generalisation as my own experience in such churches has shown differently.

Asamoah-Gyadu holds a Ph.D from Birmingham University and lectures at the Trinity Theological Seminary at Legon in Ghana. He writes in the book *African Christianity: an African Story* edited by O U Kalu and his essay is entitled, “Born of Water and the Spirit”, and deals with Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa.

His view is that a number of socio-religious factors aided the New Pentecostal churches in their growth. These included the development of a young, university educated leadership, rapid urbanisation and the collapse of African economies (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:393). He also points out that the one sided intellectual approach of orthodox Christianity was not as applicable to African culture as the recovery of the experiential aspects of faith offered by the Pentecostal churches. An aspect that he emphasises is that Pentecostalism, through its various streams, has become such a forceful movement in Africa that churches who refuse to integrate its spirituality in one form or another know that they face atrophy (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:398). In similar vein Rudolph Otto laments the inability of orthodox Christianity to recognise the value of the non-rational aspect of religion thus giving the “idea of the holy” what he expresses as a “one-sidedly intellectual approach” (Otto 1950 [1923]: 3). These New Pentecostal Churches have changed the face of African Christianity and are likely to continue to do so in their ever-changing forms. This underscores the viability of Pentecostal / Charismatic Christianity in a context where religion and life constitute inseparable entities (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:409).

8.2.1. The New Pentecostal Churches’ approach to prosperity

When referring to Chisanpo’s Pentecostal Christians, Asamoah-Gyadu describes their longing for secure employment and a happy domestic life (2005:393). It is this search for security, expressed in the desire to be free from those forces that ruin business ventures and bring poverty, which is addressed by the Pentecostal Churches.

Benson Idahosa is one of the foremost proponents of prosperity in the African church context. One of the cardinal views he expresses is the notion that it is possible to be born again and also to be fashionable. His training at the Christ for the Nations Bible Institute in Dallas Texas established in him a strong leaning towards the prosperity gospel. On his return to his message was particularly well received in Nigeria because of the war that had just ended as well as the impressive evidence of rapid growth in his church (see Kolu 2005:303).

Among the New Pentecostal Churches there is a strong emphasis on the ownership of property that is reflected in the building of large chapels with modern architectural designs (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:400). This approach may be seen in the way in which I was approached by one of

the Vineyard pastors for help in erecting their church building. When I examined their plans I found that the building design was for a 400 seat semi-circular auditorium. The problem I found with this design was that the church membership consisted of only 60 people. This incident simply illustrates the importance in African churches of giving an impression of being successful and it was this that lay behind the plan for a large building.

African religion is also expected to deal with the effects of evil caused by demonic spirits and witchcraft. These forces result in calamities such as sickness and failure in any area including business ventures, childlessness and any of the other setbacks in life. These setbacks are met by the Pentecostal Church's approach which understands these issues as being related to spiritual forces and by bringing about the needed results through deliverance, these results including, among other things, material prosperity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:407).

A successful implementation of healing and deliverance ministry paves the way for good health, success and prosperity in life, and makes possible the realisation of God-given abilities (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:408).

8.2.2. The Pentecostal understanding of ownership

In the older established Pentecostal denominations the major influence of the Holiness movement is reflected in the following: the use of excessive jewellery is forbidden, dress codes are strictly applied, ostentation in any form is not permitted, including the owning of expensive motorcars and homes. In fact it is regarded as holy to express an element of poverty. In more modern times this Puritan type ethic has had to be relaxed in order to keep the young people in the church and therefore, in many of these churches today, there is great interest in the model of motorcar driven and levels of employment attained, which have become significant as indicators of blessing. This has led to a more individualistic approach to possessions. I have entered into discussions with many young people in Pentecostal churches and there is little understanding of communality, but rather, a very Western approach to possessions prevails.

African Pentecostal prosperity theology may have some ground to recover in respect of its weak theology of suffering. Be that as it may, the Cross of Christ is not just a symbol of weakness, but also one of victory over sin, the world and death. Pentecostals draw attention to the fact that the gospel is about restoration, so it is expected that the transformation of the personality would be manifest in personal health, well being and care; in short salvation is holistic and includes spiritual as well as physical abundance (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:408).

This approach to life, which puts the emphasis on the person for producing the required result, develops an approach to possessions that is personal and individualistic as each individual is seen as the main cause of his or her situation in life.

8.2.3. How far stewardship plays a part in the ownership of possessions

There is a general emphasis on family in the New Pentecostal churches that evidences itself in the sharing of resources, much in the same way as traditional African communalism. I have found this sharing to be common in most of the Vineyard churches but to be especially predominant in the poorer churches. This conclusion would be in agreement with a previous comment regarding the call for a return to African communal culture. Another area where this concern becomes evident is in the willingness of most Pentecostal church members to take AIDS orphans and street children into their homes. This has placed a demand on local resources and the community has had to help by sharing with those who are thus involved. This concurs with Asamoah-Gyadu's conclusion that the process of restoration in these churches is not simply individualistic as the overall process involves ministration to family members to release them from the bondages associated with curses and generational ills that prevent spiritual and physical abundance (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:408). There is consequently a strange mixture of individualism and communality in many of the New Pentecostal Churches.

The classical Pentecostal churches had a very different approach to that of the New Pentecostals. Holiness was stressed, Bible study encouraged and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit enjoined. Modesty was required as was the denial of flamboyance, materialism and extravagance. (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:396). This approach is substantially different from that of the New Pentecostal churches with their prosperity gospel that emphasises the accumulation material possessions. Although there was a marked reaction against the moral compromises of some American Tele-evangelists, this has not resulted in a move away from the prosperity teachings favoured by them.

Asamoah-Gyadu makes reference to the mixture of individualism and communalism found in the New Pentecostal churches and terms it controlled materialism.

In the controlled materialism of the New Pentecostal churches Christians are required to take an upbeat approach to life (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:396).

The use of the term, controlled materialism, by Asamoah-Gyadu evidences his recognition that there is a measure of stewardship called for in the New Pentecostal churches. This means that there is never a complete denial of communality!

8.2.4. Perspectives of the local church regarding possessions

The approach of the local church in this area is evidenced in the strict control taken over the

lifestyle of the individual. While this does not quite fall into the category of the church's use of its own possessions, it does give an indication of the approach taken. Asamoah-Gyadu tells of the strict morality that characterises these churches:

A strict morality is seen in their zero tolerance for the use of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and drugs. They fulminate against adultery, violence and theft. Frequenting bars, hotels and discos are castigated as "satanic habits". These negative injunctions are balanced with clear demands for a rejuvenated strict morality put forward in an atmosphere of "religious excitement and emotionalism" (2005:392).

Although there is no clear indication of the church's approach to possessions it may be concluded that there is an unusual emphasis on externals as seen in the focus on outward behaviour. Asamoah-Gyadu refers to the emphasis on worldly blessings balanced with a healing and deliverance theology which he sees as being built on an amalgam of traditional worldviews and biblical thought (2005:401). Because there is this focus on outward things the New Pentecostal churches are particularly attractive to Africa's upwardly mobile youth. With their emphasis on lay-oriented leadership, ecclesiastical office based on a person's charismatic gifting; innovative use of modern media technologies; particular concern with congregational enlargements; and a relaxed and fashion conscious dress code for members, these New Pentecostal churches appeal to those who want to improve their position (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:401). These churches encourage the individual to pursue improvement, part of which includes the accumulation of possessions. This pursuit goes hand in hand with an encouragement to tithe on income and to give offerings over and above the tithe to the church.

In the prosperity discourse there is continuity between coming to Christ and experiencing a redemptive uplift that is evidenced partly through the possession of material goods (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:401).

Asamoah-Gyadu describes the New Pentecostal churches as having an ardent desire to appear successful in order to portray a modern outlook and an international image. Many of the leaders come from professional backgrounds and have titles such as "bishop" or "Dr". The teachings of these churches regarding prosperity is expressed in the belief that God wills spiritual and material prosperity for all believers and so every Christian must appropriate the victory that Christ has won over sin, sickness, curses, poverty and setbacks in life. These blessings may be appropriated by praying the prayer of Jabez (1 Chronicles 4:9-10) and by the faithful payment of tithes and offerings. These New Pentecostal churches teach that sowing gifts of money and other valuables into the lives of God's anointed, as the pastors are called, is one principal means of attracting God's prosperity.

Tithes and offerings, in keeping with this reciprocal giving, bring in millions in cash that enable NPCs to undertake gigantic and grandiose projects from internal resources. The theological outlook of the NPCs therefore tends to be more immediate, and this is reflected in everything they do. For instance, the words of the born again have performative effect, so debts, unemployment, unhappy marriages, and spiritual torments, may all be cursed in prayer while blessings of money, children, promotions at work and happiness may be claimed. The Kingdom is seen in earthly terms, and is established through the power of prayer, positive thinking, and adherence to the principles of success and prosperity such as giving (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:401).

We may conclude that Pentecostal spirituality, as preached in the New Pentecostal Churches, is one in which Jesus Christ saves people from sin, heals sickness, and delivers from the power of Satan. Salvation obtains a holistic meaning which includes a sense of well being evidenced in freedom from sickness, poverty and misfortune as well as in deliverance from sin and evil (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 409).

8.2.5. The way the resources of the local church tend to be used

An unusual development in these NPCs has been their involvement in the political and economic life of the nations they are placed in. Their resources are being used, among other interests, to establish Christian educational institutions of higher learning. These institutions embrace theology as well as economics and business studies. Asamoah-Gyadu holds that, if this approach is maintained, it will help bridge the gap between the academic and experiential faith that exposed the deficiencies in the training of historic mission pastors that emerged in the face of African religio-cultural realities (2005:405).

Another area where resources are made available is that of transformation:

A sense of transformation takes place at the personal and communal levels including a new dynamism in worship inspired by the Holy Spirit (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:406).

Aligned with this sense of transformation goes a theology of empowerment which has a strong element of recognising the anointing in the individual. However there is the involvement of the local church in providing the wherewithal for small business enterprises in order to assist the individual in becoming self-supporting. This approach has been prevalent especially in various denominations, including the Vineyard churches, in providing for local pastors to develop small businesses in order to be self-supporting. Asamoah-Gyadu mentions the need for empowerment as a prerequisite for survival in the precarious African environment (2005:407).

I do not draw conclusions from this examination of Asamoah-Gyadu's offering, nor do I do so with the other theologians examined; I draw some common conclusions after examining them all.

8.3. Allan Anderson

Allan Anderson is the director of the Centre for the Study of New Religious Movements at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham University. He has written numerous articles on the Pentecostal church in Africa as well as the book *Bazalwane, African Pentecostals in South Africa*.

In his publications, Anderson analyses the beginnings and development of the Pentecostal movement in Africa. He was born in Zimbabwe and was awarded his Ph.D. through the University of South Africa.

Anderson makes a number of statements that are helpful for understanding the ethos of the New Pentecostal churches and I offer some of these insights as an introduction to this examination of his writings regarding possessions in these churches.

Anderson asserts that Pentecostalism is not a predominantly Western movement, but both fundamentally and dominantly a Third World phenomenon (2000:3). Pentecostal liturgies have social and revolutionary implications, in that they empower marginalized people. They assimilate what is acceptable that ordinary people have in the worship of God and thus overcome the real barriers of race, social status, and education. From Anderson's comments one may assume that the constant interaction between the Pentecostal churches and the spirit world is an indicator of an accommodation that is not necessarily syncretistic (Anderson 2000:6).

These Pentecostal churches are, like the older AICs before them, an African phenomenon, churches that for the most part have been instituted by Africans for Africans (Anderson 2000:10).

8.3.1. Examining prosperity

Anderson makes reference to the works of Gifford who arrives at the conclusion that these new Pentecostal churches reproduce some of the worst forms of capitalism in Christian guise. Gifford is assessed by Anderson as the main proponent of this view, suggesting that the collapse of African economies has resulted in these new churches having an increasing financial dependence on the New Pentecostal churches in the USA. Gifford analyses Americanisation, as cultural and economic influence, as the growth factor. Anderson does not agree and quotes Ogbu Kalu in support of the notion that there is a mutual dependency between the New Pentecostal churches in the United States of America and the New Pentecostal churches in Africa (Anderson 2000:11). Anderson points out that in traditional Africa, wealth and success are naturally seen as signs of the blessing of God, so it is no wonder that such a message should be uncritically accepted here; and this holds true for the older AICs as well.

The God who forgives sin is also deeply concerned about powerlessness manifested in poverty, oppression and (especially) in liberation from all of people's physical afflictions. It is this message of physical liberation that makes the Pentecostal churches so attractive to Africans (Anderson 2006:3).

These new Pentecostal churches adopt a holistic approach to Christianity and preach a gospel that includes deliverance from all types of oppression such as sickness, sorcery, evil spirits and poverty. Anderson states clearly that, for these churches, God meets all the needs of people, including their spiritual salvation, physical healing and other material needs (Anderson 2000:6).

From the above it may be concluded that the New Pentecostal churches understand prosperity to be an indicator of God's blessing, and poverty to be, if not a sign of being cursed, at least a sign of the absence of that blessing.

The greatest attraction of AIC's was the open invitation to the Africans to bring their fears and anxieties about witches, sorcerers, bad luck, poverty, illness and all kinds of misfortunes to the church leadership (Anderson 2006:3).

This is part of the attraction of the New Pentecostal churches as they approach spiritual oppression within the context of poverty and lack in the African context.

8.3.2. The Pentecostal understanding of ownership

African Pentecostalism reflects the same characteristics as Western Pentecostalism, especially in the capitalistic emphasis on prosperity and success. Because of these emphases Anderson sees many unresolved questions facing African Christianity, such as the role of success and prosperity in God's economy, enjoying God and his gifts, including healing and material provision, and the holistic dimension of salvation, which is always meaningful in an African context (Anderson 2000:13).

Gifford's criticism of the incipient capitalism in the new Pentecostal churches points to the inroads made by the individualism of Western capitalism in the African Pentecostal churches. This notion posits an understanding of ownership that tends away from the normal communalism of African culture.

Anderson takes issue with this notion as being prejudiced and offers a different interpretation of how these churches regard ownership.

According to Anderson there is a definite understanding of God's ownership of all creation in the New Pentecostal churches and of his right to disburse resources in any form he wishes. The problem is that this brings back the notion of some being blessed by God with possessions while others are not so favoured. In order to combat this, the members are advised to achieve success in

the material realm. The use made of tithing and offering in order to achieve a blessing is emphasised by Anderson and he quotes from Asamoah-Gyadu in support.

8.3.3. Stewardship of possessions

These churches have reconstructed Western Pentecostalism and brought in innovations in order to adapt it to the radically different African context. Part of this adaptation involves the development of a strong sense of a community made up of God's born again people. There is thus an identifying with a group that bears strong similarities to the clan or tribe. Because of this there is a leaning towards sharing and helping one another. However, Anderson points out that, although the newer churches have embraced an understanding of the nuclear family there is a tension between African traditional culture and ethnic ties and the Western notion of possessions, thus enabling members to escape the onerous commitments to the extended family and to achieve success and accumulate possessions independently (Anderson 2000:12).

Anderson's main focus is on the emphasis on healing in the new Pentecostal churches and he does not focus on the stewardship of possessions. However, the mention of capitalism shows his acceptance of a more individualistic approach in these churches.

8.3.4. Local church perspective on ownership

In dealing with the claim by Gifford that the New Pentecostal churches represent an Americanisation of African Christianity, Anderson refers to a comment by David Maxwell regarding the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa. Maxwell asserts that this movement's prosperity teachings have arisen from predominantly African sources and are shaped by local concerns. The rapid social changes in Zimbabwe have called for a radical approach to deriving reasons for such changes. The teachings of the church on the spirit of poverty resonate with ideas of self-reliance, indigenous business and black empowerment. Anderson also refers to Matthews Ojo who says that the new Pentecostal churches are increasingly responding to the needs and aspirations of Nigerians amid the uncertainty of their political life and the pain of their constant and unending economic adjustments (Anderson 2000:13).

Anderson expresses concern over a number of characteristics found in the Pentecostal churches such as a tendency towards paternalism and reluctance to listen to voices from the third world, a need for a greater involvement in the plight of the poor and in opposing socio-political oppression (2000:2). The local Pentecostal churches preach a message that includes healing from sickness and deliverance from evil in all its manifestations, spiritual, social and structural. Many of these new churches evidence the three requirements of establishment; self-governing, self-propagating

and (to a certain extent) self-supporting. There is marked emphasis on being self-sufficient and this value brings these churches into conflict with traditional African culture.

In my contact with new Pentecostal churches I have found it obvious that there is an emphasis on being blessed with possessions, and the pastor and leaders need to evidence this blessing as an example of results coming from keeping to certain behaviour patterns that give these required results. The church's need for buildings and equipment evidences this belief that blessings follow on from doing right.

8.3.5. Use of the local church's possessions

In a paper dealing with African Initiated churches Anderson makes reference to the way in which problems of disease and evil affect the whole community and are not simply a private domain relegated to individual pastoral care (Anderson 1997:6). He points out that, traditional African communities are predominantly health oriented, where rituals in this regard are prominent. These AIC churches declared a message that reclaimed ancient biblical traditions of healing and protection from evil (Anderson 1997:6). This pragmatic gospel dealt with poverty as a curse involving evil spirits that could be countermanded by prayer and the involvement of the anointed ones in the church.

Anderson refers to Maimela's observation that the greatest attraction of these churches lay in their open invitation to the Africans to bring their fears and anxieties about witches, sorcerers, bad luck, poverty, illness and all kinds of misfortune to the church leadership (Anderson 2006:3). This form of Christianity has a special appeal for Africans in an urbanised Western context. There would be prolonged periods of individual and communal prayer aimed at problems such as unemployment and poverty amongst other issues. Resources in these churches would be used to an extent in alleviating needs in the individual member.

The idea that the prosperity churches in Africa are led by unscrupulous manipulators, greedy for wealth and power, does not account for the increasing popularity of these new churches with educated and responsible people who continue to give financial support and feel their needs are met there (Anderson 2000:12).

8.4. Musa Gaiya

Musa Gaiya is an associate professor in the department of Religious Studies at the University of Jos in Nigeria. He wrote a paper "The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria", presented at the Centre of African Studies at the University of Copenhagen in July 2002.

Gaiya's paper approaches a number of the aspects of Pentecostal church life in Nigeria, most of

which lie beyond the scope of this thesis. I focus on those sections where he deals particularly with issues such as prosperity, wealth, possessions and stewardship, especially as they have bearing on the approach of the Pentecostal churches to these issues.

8.4.1. The approach of the Nigerian Pentecostal churches to prosperity

Gaiya comments on the proliferation of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria by stating that the establishment of churches is one of the most lucrative businesses in Nigeria (Gaiya 2002:2). In listing churches in Nigeria he points to many who have prosperity as their focal point. Gaiya also refers to Gifford's writings and his conclusion that African Pentecostal teachings lean heavily on a model imported from America or Britain. These influences cannot be denied and are evident in the teachings on faith, prosperity, miracles etc. However, with Anderson he notes certain peculiarities in the African variety such as the recognition that demons and witchcraft are phenomena needing to be dealt with (Gaiya 2002:8).

There are exceptions to the general tenor of Pentecostal teachings as evidenced in the Deeper Life Bible Church of William Kumuyi, one of the largest churches in Nigeria that does not have an emphasis on prosperity. Being a Pentecostal church it does have the emphases on holiness and healing. This church is an exception to the importance placed by the Pentecostal churches on prosperity as an indicator of God's blessing.

8.4.2. The Nigerian Pentecostal church's notion of ownership

Gaiya notes that Matthew Oshimolowo, a Nigerian, owns the largest Pentecostal church in London. Regarding the notion of ownership Gaiya quotes Idahosa speaking in a crusade in Cameroon as saying that faith had brought him so many clothes he did not know he had them; a car even Nigeria's President Babangida could not match (Gaiya 2002:9). A contrast to this attitude is that of the Deeper Life church where the emphasis is more on restitution as a proof of being born again. This restitution is the action of restoring anything to its rightful owner or an action of giving an equivalent for loss or damage (Gaiya 2002:14). Kumuyi, the leader, does not make prosperity a central issue in his teaching and the church has fairly open practices regarding finances (a weekly announcement of what has been received in church collections).

This church practices the opposite of New Pentecostal churches in general (Gaiya 2002:17). From this one may conclude that, with a few exceptions, the general approach of the New Pentecostal churches in Nigeria lines up with that of New Pentecostal churches in other parts of Africa, namely, a markedly Western approach that emphasises individual ownership.

8.4.3. The notion of stewardship

Kumuyi (Deeper Life Bible church) teaches a strict code of personal ethics involving withdrawal from the world, which includes the stewardship of possessions and practices in society (Gaiya 2002:12). This church follows Wesley's teachings on holiness and Kumuyi himself has written a code of holiness declaring that a Christian should be free from sin. This viewpoint prevents him from having a television ministry and keeps the use of musical instruments in the churches to organs and trumpets. There is a special dress code for members and women are not allowed to use cosmetics or put on rings or wear trousers (Gaiya 2002:15). Kumuyi once reprimanded a state co-ordinator who drove into the headquarters of the church in an expensive car. He himself drives a Peugeot 405. This approach is virtually unique in the Nigerian Pentecostal church where flamboyant leaders parade possessions as evidence of the blessing of God (Gaiya 2002:17).

Gaiya focuses on Kumuyi's Deeper Life Bible church in his paper and his references to the other Pentecostal churches are secondary.

Two views of stewardship emerge, the one advocating the proper use of God-given possessions so as not to appear ostentatious, the other freely displaying possessions in an individualistic and flamboyant way. The former would incorporate a strong sense of responsibility to God for the ownership and use of possessions while the other would be free to accumulate and use possessions for individual gratification with little responsibility for those in need. Generally speaking there is a mixture of these two approaches in the New Pentecostal churches with leadership favouring a more caring and responsible approach.

8.4.4. The perspective of the local church regarding possessions

Gaiya says nothing in this regard and I therefore pass on to the next subsection.

8.4.5. How the resources of the local church tend to be used

Once again Gaiya favours the Deeper Life church in his comments. He tells of the women's committee in this church that looks after the welfare of women. He refers to the way in which assistance is given to members in the different zones who might have financial problems. Home caring fellowships are formed to provide companionship for members and provide support in any way needed. These fellowships also exist in universities and campuses where they try to provide accommodation for stranded students as well as food for members and needy non-members. Gaiya tells of how Rebecca Ibrahim shared her room with six girls who had lost their accommodation in the town because of the religious riots of September 2001 (Gaiya 2002:19). This description of the caring attitude of the Deeper Life church reflects a generally caring attitude in New Pentecostal churches towards those in their midst who are needy. The resources

of the church are to be used to alleviate need and poverty where possible.

8.5. Birgit Meyer

Birgit Meyer is a researcher at the Research Centre for Religion and Society at the University of Amsterdam. In an essay on “Christianity in Africa: from African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches”, she examines the influence of these churches on the African church.

Meyer has written on the development of Pentecostal churches and their origins focussing mainly on the churches in West Africa. As a Christian anthropologist her research is particularly astute and has great bearing on the influence of the Pentecostal churches. Her research covers an area far beyond the scope of this thesis and I focus only on those passages where she deals with the influence of the prosperity gospel on the African Pentecostal church.

In drawing a distinction between the AIC and New Pentecostal churches her main emphasis lies in the contrast between the leaders of the two movements. The leadership of the AICs is in the hands of a prophetic figure, often modelled on the Old Testament concept of the prophetic seen in the image of the African prophets from the Zionist, Nazarite or Aludra churches. The leadership of the New Pentecostal churches is more often vested in the charismatic, anointed, flamboyant leaders of the new mega churches.

8.5.1. The approach to prosperity

The tendency towards the prosperity gospel is a relatively new development in Pentecostal church circles and is more typical of the New Pentecostal churches. In their endeavour to attain international recognition and fit into the scheme of globalisation from a Christian perspective, these churches have adopted names that reflect this endeavour and which incorporate “international” or “global” in the title of the church. To the extent that this occurs, it is reflective of a global phenomenon identifying them with churches in many parts of the world that also propagate the prosperity gospel. (Meyer 2004: 453). Meyer refers to the rise of neo-liberal millennial capitalism (Meyer 2004:453). A significant part of this capitalistic approach is a desire to be part of the modern world. These churches appear to be typically un-African and to be eager to embrace Western capitalism. Meyer concurs with the previous theologians in assessing the New Pentecostal churches. In describing the tendencies of the leaders of the new churches she describes their appearance.

The leaders who dress in the latest (African) fashion, drive nothing less than a Mercedes Benz, participate in the global Pentecostal jet-set, broadcast the message

through flashy TV and radio programs, and preach the Prosperity Gospel to their deprived and hitherto hopeless born-again followers at home and in the diaspora (Meyer 2004: 448).

Many Nigerian video-movies have the theme of the ability of power and wealth to seduce the staunchest born-again pastor. Smith (quoted by Meyer) maintains that charismatic Pentecostalism not only tends to reproduce the structures of inequality against which it positions itself but also stands dangerously close to the world of witchcraft, and while critiquing the possibly evil, occult sources of wealth, is easily suspected of drawing on those (Meyer 2004:460). This is an interesting position taken regarding the ambivalence of the New Pentecostal church's attitude toward possessions and wealth. Prosperity is sought after as an indicator of God's blessing but prosperity attained from the wrong sources is condemned.

More research needs to be conducted to assess the way in which the Prosperity Gospel is at once PCCs (Pentecostal Charismatic Churches) main attraction and, as the promise in the long run fails to materialise among most ordinary believers, its main weakness (Meyer 2004:460).

8.5.2. The understanding of ownership

While some researchers maintain that cultural notions of communality hold sway over the incipient individualism of western based churches, Meyer maintains that present New Pentecostal churches do not tend to follow this trend and, on the contrary, seem to eagerly embrace capitalism (Meyer 2004:454). The result of this approach is an emphasis on individual ownership.

Among the New Pentecostal churches poverty or lack in any form is to a large extent seen as emanating from demonic sources or as being the result of incorrect living. This approach is very similar to that adopted by the African Traditional churches. The results of living a moral life and practicing right money management with deliverance will result in an increase in possessions and, in general, the good things of life. A further factor needing to be dealt with is the linking of bloodlines through the extended family that has a detrimental affect on material conditions. These factors affect consumption, the prospect of prosperity and the prevalence or not of prosperity. The quest in all these aforementioned rituals is for an increase in the ownership of possessions as evidence of the favour of God being bestowed on the individual.

Occult forces, embodied by the spirit of poverty, may block the accumulation of capital, seductive powers, as embodied by Mami Water, may induce them to squander their money on petty things such as cosmetics, perfumes, and sweets, whereas witchcraft and ancestral spirits may prevent them from prospering in life (Meyer 2004:461).

There is an emphasis on the ownership of possessions in these churches as evidenced in the amount of teaching around this subject. The assessing of a person's value and spirituality by the

amount and quality of their possessions continues to be prevalent in these churches resulting in an emphasis on individual ownership.

8.5.3. Stewardship of possessions

Pentecostal churches are generally better off than their established church counterparts. This is due to the teaching on tithing (giving 10%) which is practiced as part of the stewardship of income. In order for believers to progress some of these churches offer their needy members a small loan. This enables them to engage in trade and to become financially independent. Obviously this holds benefits for the individual but also for the church in the longer term as the success of the member yields a greater return to the church. The tendency of mainline churches to see poverty as a part of holiness is resented by the New Pentecostal churches as contrary to the teaching of the bible regarding God's desire to bless his people.

The figure of the charismatic pastor, with such stars as Nicolas Duncan-Williams and Mensah Otabil (Ghana), Nevers Mumba (Zambia) and, most important, Benson Idahosa (Nigeria) as paradigmatic figures, dressed in exquisite garments and driving a posh car pinpoints that prosperity and being born again are held to be two sides of the same coin (Meyer 2004:459).

The New Pentecostal churches warn against crude behaviour and advise the wise use of the money they earn. There is much teaching on proper moral behaviour in respect of avoidance of excess, proper attitudes to women, marriage, and relationships. The correct approach to material things and the proper use of resources is part of ensuring future prosperity.

The implication of the above is that there is a strong control of the individual's stewardship by the church, especially regarding tithing, as the resources of the church are vitally dependent upon the material success of such individuals. Some of these churches require the individuals to reveal their income and keep records of whether the individual is tithing or not.

8.5.4. The perspective of the local church regarding possessions

In the previous sub-section I referred to the approach of the local church regarding possessions, especially from the perspective of the income of such local churches. The new Pentecostal churches also develop their links with the global Pentecostal community and present themselves as being up with modern methods and thinking. However, Meyer sees them as offering a form of Christianity that links in to the local situation (Meyer 2004:459). The result of this approach by the local church is (where possible) the building of huge churches to accommodate thousands of believers, wide use of modern technology and the use of television, radio and large crusades, often with well-known foreign speakers. Much use is made of sound technology to produce music CDs of high quality. All this, plus the use of trend-setting modes of dress, gives the impression of

being part of the modern world (Meyer 2004:459). The importance of appearing on a par with Western churches in America and Europe forms a strong incentive for accumulating the best in terms of décor and technology.

8.5.5. Ways in which the resources of the local church tend to be used

One of the unnoticed resources of the New Pentecostal churches is their ability to deal with the demonic and such things as curses. This ability is available to local believers and is often a resource with results for the church.

“Your miracle is on the way”, a popular slogan, to be seen on church advertisements, car stickers and shops all over Africa, which embodies the power of the still unfulfilled, yet resilient “expectations of modernity” which are frustrated by daily experiences of disconnectedness and marginalisation (Meyer 2004:460).

In these churches there is more serious consideration given to the role of spiritual forces in the positives and negatives of people’s lives than is given consideration in the main line churches. In this regard there is an essentially African flavour to these churches shown in their incorporating of much that is common in the AIC’s. Therefore, at the same time as addressing the desire of Africans to be part of the wider international world, the New Pentecostal churches articulate a Christianity that is relevant to local material and spiritual needs. The teaching of these churches with regard to the desire of young Africans who aspire to be upwardly mobile is that this goal can be achieved through a God-given miracle.

One of the significant factors in these new Pentecostal churches is the embracing of the traditional African concepts of the extended family. New forms of community are expressed which tend to develop surrogate families within the church body, most typically seen in the formation of small kinship groups. Members refer to each other as “brother” and “sister” thus engendering imaginations of community that go beyond the traditional African communal type of tribe, clan or ethnic group. Even national groupings are surpassed by this notion of the people or family of God.

Within this communal concept there exists an element of African culture not reflecting the traditional understanding, but reflecting the ethos of that tradition. In this understanding there is an acceptance of a limited co-responsibility within the community of the church. (See Meyer 2004:461).

Many of these new churches have extended programmes for caring for the poor, for housing AIDS orphans and for training young people in basic skills in order to empower them. In this sense there is a taking up of responsibility for those who have not and seeking to lift them up

through a sharing of resources, possessions and facilities.

8.6. Dr. Anssi Simojoki

Anssi Simojoki is the vice-president of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation – Africa. He has written an article on “The other Gospel of Neo–Pentecostalism in East Africa”.

Once again, as a theologian, he draws the conclusion that “Neo-Pentecostalism is currently changing Christianity very powerfully” (Simojoki 2002: 271). The emphasis in the message is seen to be human-centred with the promise of instant health, wealth and success. He also makes reference to the mass meetings made possible because of the availability of access to the mass media. These mass media productions present what Simojoki has classified as a message that is essentially different to the traditional Christian as well as the traditional Pentecostal proclamation. As Simojoki does not present material that may be delineated in a similar way to the previous theologians examined in this chapter, I intend offering a collage of relevant extractions from his paper.

Instead of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the centre is occupied by miracles and the improvement of the quality of life, along with temporal blessings from God (Simojoki 2002:272).

Simojoki refers to the new laws accompanying the “deliverance Christianity” of which he is critical, the most important of these being tithing. Tithing is one way of guaranteeing God’s temporal blessings.

Simojoki’s main criticism of these churches relates to the non-sacramental nature of their theology and their non-liturgical practices. As a Lutheran he looks for a structured church approach that he finds basically lacking in these churches. The bulk of his paper concerns this aspect and is irrelevant for this thesis. However, some of his comments throw light on the new Pentecostal churches approach to possessions and it is for this reason I have included him.

On the continent where the population is exploding, where corruption is undermining the national economies and preventing development, there is unlimited demand for inexpensive cures for illnesses – whatever form these may take (Simojoki 2002:273).

Simojoki points out that the movement in these churches appears to be away from an emphasis on the gift of the gospel to the law of a volitional Christian life of wholeness. What becomes evident to him is that there is a dual emphasis in these churches with equal weight being given to the future (eschaton) and the present. This could be described as an emphasis on the Kingdom yet to come and the Kingdom now (Ladd 1959, 1974). There is divergence of opinion amongst theologians regarding eschatology and the New Pentecostal churches fall into the category of pre-

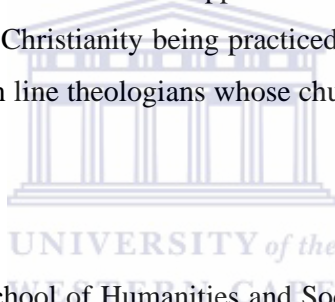
millennialism coupled with an element of a “Kingdom Now” emphasis. It is this dual understanding that allows the new churches to preach a message of the second coming of Christ in a future date as well as the invasion of this present imperfect life by the Kingdom of God resulting in an improvement of circumstances, which most Africans are looking for.

In these churches it is taught that it is the power of the Spirit which brings about these changes in circumstances in response to certain “divine laws” which involve right living and right giving.

In addition to health problems, one finds the middle class issues of relationships, marriage, career development, and finances. There are also ministries that are entirely specialised in the needs of business people, the generation of income, and the problems of enterprise, which are to be solved by the power of the Spirit (Simojoki 2002: 274).

When the evil spirits are exorcised out of the Christian by a certain mass-meeting technique, the Christian has been released, delivered into a life of abundance, in which spiritual and temporal blessings flow without hindrance (Simojoki 2002:275).

Once again Simojoki criticises the materialistic approach of the new Pentecostal churches with the added critique of the style of Christianity being practiced. It should be noted that most of the criticism does emanate from main line theologians whose churches are being impacted negatively by these new churches.



8.7. Mary Getui

Mary Getui is the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. She is actively involved in the activities of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians and has published widely. I include Getui in this chapter because of her critical approach to the materialism that is rampant amongst the New Pentecostal churches as well as in urban African society. Her contribution throws light on the impact this growing materialism is having on mainline theologians and represents a fair summary of such theologians’ criticism.

Getui expresses a concern about the Western individualism that has penetrated African culture. Her position is that if Africa would resist this selfishness, which is contrary to the spirit of “ubuntu”, then the conclusion may be drawn that Africa does have the potential for affluence. For this to occur there would need to be a check on the current exploitation of resources and the individual accumulation of wealth especially by the rich nations and the large Western corporations.

There is no chance of (so-called) poor countries developing adequately unless the rich countries reduce the huge proportion they contribute to the total impact. This would involve a program of de-development of the rich world. The rich must live more simply that the poor may simply live (Getui 1989:64).

Getui feels this is especially true of Africa with its predominance of poverty existing around pockets of affluence, such affluence being in the hands of a small minority of the population. There exists a small number of rich elite in every country, while the majority of the population of Africa lives in poverty. This situation, evidenced by the existence of a few rich nations and many poor ones, is seen by Getui as an indication of social injustice. At no time is it right for anyone to lack, especially when another has plenty and perhaps excess. The Old Testament prophets were used by God to condemn this practice (Getui 1989:64).

If God disapproved of this situation in biblical times then there is no reason to expect his approval in our times. Alongside this situation of poverty versus affluence is the problem of social stratification on the grounds of possessions. The materialism of the West has so penetrated African culture that Getui can remark on the lines of stratification being drawn on the basis of possessions – land, cars, houses, money etc. This is obvious in public places where those who have more material means are given faster, more efficient and better service. In commenting on this growing materialism in the African culture, Getui makes two telling statements:

This materialistic outlook on life may explain the many unhappy and unstable marriages that are common in Africa today, especially among the so-called elite of society. Unhappy marriages are a sign of a sick society. In order for an individual to achieve certain goals certain strategies have to be laid and followed (Getui 1989:65).

It is a mad rush in a bid to acquire as much as possible – houses, land, cars and any other material possessions – within the shortest time possible (Getui 1989:65).

The issue of exploitation is of major concern to Getui and is expressed by her in numerous ways, particularly when considering the exploitation of the poor that is possible because of the position of privilege enjoyed by those who hold the means of wealth and production. Clearly the issue of poverty is linked to the issue of power, and wealth goes with power. Many African politicians, who do hold power, are notorious exploiters of their people (Getui 1989:67).

Of concern is the way in which the desire for material things has had an effect upon the spiritual aspects of people's lives. Getui quotes Hans Freyer's words in this regard, "The standard of living is the God of the twentieth century and production its prophet" (Getui 1989:68). This spiritual desert is the worst result of the drive for material possessions and results in the whole of society becoming the poorer. In this type of society the ownership and consumption of resources ends up in the hands of a few resulting in excessive consumerism. The result of extreme poverty is the reduction of human beings to the level of animals. Getui seeks for a co-operation between the poor and the rich in Africa that will result in a responsible lifting of standards (Getui 1989:69). The following theological and moral points made by Getui are relevant.

She argues that the two pre-conditions for the enjoyment of affluence are the religious (state of faith) and the social (that affluence must be shared).

The first pre-condition leads us to the Biblical / Christian teaching and African understanding that all the resources of the universe and the gifts and skills we possess come from God. All things at our disposal should therefore be used for his glory. Therefore the best approach to material possessions would be detachment, simplicity and communalism (in the sense of community consciousness). Getui concludes that the more our resources the greater our responsibilities and obligations (Getui 1989:70).

Getui expresses a typically African approach to possessions in that she is strongly drawn to a communal understanding of life. She calls for a new approach to resources through a change in the approach to the use of goods and possessions by church and society, including government, which would see a far more equitable distribution.

God does not give us resources and gifts for ourselves alone but that all may be enriched and all may worship him regardless of their colour or the part of the world from which they come. The African concept of kinship as practiced in the traditional society is also something that can be applied in the service of others. All people worked tirelessly and sacrificed for the good of others (Getui 1989:70).

Getui calls for an equality to be displayed in which no one lacks unnecessarily because of a global effort towards complementing one another as nations with each nation supplying out of its abundance; all contributions together making the world a better place to live in! To this call for communality Getui adds the need for individual responsibility in the ownership and use of possessions.

Each individual ought to adopt a sense of accountability, responsibility and integrity in the understanding of and approach to the use of material things (Getui 1989:71).

Getui points out that the church has a central role to play in this development by giving teaching and setting an example. As the church sets an example in the selfless use of resources and possessions it will teach society that the proper approach to these possessions is not so much in their ownership as in the way they are used.

Possessions are tools towards making each individual and society realise the humanity of all others in line with God's desire and design (Getui 1989:71).

Getui calls for a redistribution of goods and resources with the rich enabling the poor. This is typical of the approach of the liberation theologians. This too would make her seem out of place in the list of theologians commenting on the New Pentecostal churches. However, much of her article deals with the inroads of materialism in the New Pentecostal churches and, although

carrying hints of reconstruction theology is relevant in this chapter.

When she speaks of the accessibility to material things she refers to the need for intervention by church and state in an endeavour to reconstruct society towards a more equitable format.

She calls for the church to operate prophetically by delivering a call for responsible stewardship of all resources by government and society as well as for the church to set an example by the way in which it stewards its own resources and cares for its own poor. She is particularly concerned for the level of influence exercised in the church as seen in the influence of materialism in the Pentecostal churches.

In this Getui brings a strong argument against the materialism prevalent in the teaching of the New Pentecostal churches and calls for a more equitable distribution of goods to all of society. The incipient materialism of these New Pentecostal churches is one of the targets of her article and as such she is included in the list of theologians dealing with the notion of possessions in the New Pentecostal churches.

8.8. Conclusion

In spite of the criticism levelled at these Neo-Pentecostal churches and the predictions of failure because of an inability to deliver, there is nevertheless evidence of rapid growth and an increasing exodus from mainline churches to them. This growth has been a factor in the critical approach of most of the theologians examined in this chapter.

Except for Allan Anderson and, to an extent Birgit Meyer, the other theologians I have examined have had a rather jaundiced view of the New Pentecostal churches. One of the reasons is possibly their break with traditional church structures and practices. Another would be the increasing materialism in African society being exhibited in these churches. However, the major unhappiness appears to be the movement of people from the mainline churches to the New Pentecostal churches.

A number of conclusions may be drawn regarding the contribution that these churches may make to a theology of possessions.

These churches have, to a large extent, successfully married the traditional African religious notion of the spiritual aspect of all of life with a capitalistic approach to possessions, thereby meeting needs that the mainline churches do not meet. This understanding that the material aspects of life have religious or spiritual sources relates well with traditional African cultural

approaches to life. It also brings material goods within the grasp of ordinary people through the use of spiritual means that are available to all.

The introduction of the notion that material blessings are evidence of God's blessing places them in the mainstream of Western capitalistic thought, especially that of American consumerism. It also places them at variance with the anti-prosperity teachings of cessationism. These teachings regard the forming of the canon of the bible as heralding the end of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit. As such this sector of the church is opposed to any supernatural manifestations being regarded as legitimate. Therefore to seek for prosperity through being freed from some demonic force is regarded by them as illegitimate.

The notion that deliverance from evil spirits can bring about a change in circumstances is applied particularly to the area of finances and possessions. Poverty is regarded as a spiritual malaise. This finds credence in traditional African culture.

Of import is the understanding that the church can become the vehicle for changing poverty into prosperity through anointed leaders who have insight into the areas of economics, as is seen by the evidence of prosperity in their own lives.

Certain rules of living and giving are given as catalysts to bring in the desired prosperity. These include the giving of finances and goods.

This change in circumstance from poverty to prosperity is not to be seen as an opportunity for licence but requires a certain amount of responsible stewardship as a member of the church community. This would involve charity towards those in need and an acceptance that blessings are given to some people in order to be shared with others.

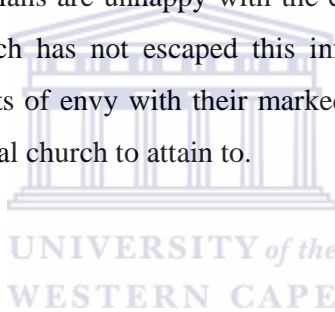
In the teachings of these churches Christ is portrayed as the sole answer to all of life's problems whether spiritual, economic, health or communal / social. Solutions lie in spiritual exercises and prayers, and sometimes exorcism. The notion of possessions includes accumulation and good stewardship without any stigma being attached to wanting to accumulate more. Much is made of the passages of scripture that refer to the blessings bestowed on the Patriarchs and there is almost an aversion to any teaching regarding suffering or "giving up".

There is no doubt that these churches have struck a chord in the heart of African people with their solutions to the many areas of need in African society. Their style of worship and dealing with the spirit world lies close to the heart of African culture and should be recognised as more applicable to African traditional culture than most of the stiff formalism found in the historic churches. Their teaching on prosperity raises hope in people who have suffered the numbing

affects of grinding poverty and offers them a way of escape. This gives credibility and popularity to these churches.

Local churches in this sector of the African church operate as centres for gaining prosperity. People are encouraged to give to the local church as “God’s storehouse” in order to gain the advantages of Malachi 3:10. The issue of the tithe is central and some of these churches monitor the giving of the members by requiring payslips to be brought to the pastor and marked envelopes to be used for giving. In this way the churches are kept in funds. Part of the role played by these churches is to ensure that members are kept in employment. If unemployed the church will lay out some finances in order to start the member on some entrepreneurial venture.

The marked American influence on these churches gives them a semblance of modernity which has drawn many to them as offering hope for becoming part of the prosperous West. However, a significant aspect of African culture, namely communality, is suffering damage because of this influence. Most African theologians are unhappy with the emphasis on possessions which they regard as unbiblical. The church has not escaped this influence and these New Pentecostal churches have become the objects of envy with their marked use of technology being seen as a standard for even the smallest rural church to attain to.



CHAPTER 9

THE STATE OF THE DEBATE ON A THEOLOGY OF POSSESSIONS IN THE AFRICAN CHURCH

9.1. Introduction

In this chapter I, a) summarise the approaches to a theology of possessions as represented by the theologians examined in the last five chapters, b) assess the current state of the debate in African Christian theology on a theology of possessions, c) analyse where the debate on a theology of possessions is heading, d) discuss how this theology of possessions in the African church should be mapped, e) assess how different economic systems and worldviews play a crucial role in understanding the different positions held on a theology of possessions in the African church, f) assess the impact of these factors, namely, colonialism, spiritual versus material life, and the impact on the connectivity of life, on some essential areas of African life.

This chapter includes material from current theological publications produced by theologians who assess the inroads made into African traditional culture by urbanisation and consumerism. Such theologians as are referred to would be those who attempt to arrive at reconciliation between African traditional culture and Western capitalism as it is expressed in consumerism (e.g. Anthony Balcomb, Kwame Bediako, John Mbiti and Jesse Mugambi).

9.2. Contributions to a theology of possessions

9.2.1. The missionary movement (chapter 4)

In this section I refer to the influence of various missionary movements coming from Puritan, Pietistic, Monastic, Evangelical and Pentecostal backgrounds. In doing so I use common conclusions derived from the content of chapter 4 so as to put forward a calculated result regarding a theology of possessions in the African church resulting from such missionary movements. Most of these missionary movements developed out of communities that emphasised the value of hard work and frugality. This applies to both Protestant and early Catholic missions (see Beidelman 1982 regarding an anthropological history of missions in Africa). Despite this focus on hard work and frugality there was still a marked disparity between the possessions held by the missionaries and those held by the people they came to minister to (see Parker [undated], Beidelman 1982, Kruger 1966). This was due to the missionaries the way the missionaries maintained a European standard of living (even though this standard would have been regarded as poor in Europe; see Oliver 1952). The obvious disparity between the missionaries and the local populace was marked by the possessions held by such missionaries, possessions the local people had never seen before. Where before the African people had been content with very little, the coming of the missionaries resulted in an increased focus on material things and a longing to possess such material things.

Some missionaries avoided this disparity by adopting the lifestyle of the African people, but they were the exception. For an example of this exception one may cite the account of Van der Kemp at Bethelsdorp. He lived in a hut and wore local dress, much to the disdain of fellow missionaries (see du Plessis 1965:126, Roy 2000:129,).

In a similar vein the Roman Catholic mission stations, although staffed by men with monastic backgrounds, built substantial mission compounds, well equipped with all the necessities of life. For, although the Roman Catholic missionaries adopted a vow of poverty, the church built to last and did not believe in stinting on the way they equipped these stations (see Beidelman 1982:117).

In this way a heightened awareness of the disparity in living standards and the ownership of possessions developed among the African people that resulted in a focus on possessions that the missionaries themselves sought to avoid. This inadvertently prepared the way for the acceptance of Western capitalism and materialism. A focus on things developed among the people in the vicinity of the mission stations that surprised the missionaries. This envy became a major source of concern and the methods used in the mission field came under criticism (see Beidelman 1982: 118). Yet, this envy was produced by the missionaries bringing their home standards of living, and what they considered the minimum necessary for survival, into a culture with very little in the way of possessions (see Wagner 1972:119).

By the end of colonialism many of the missionaries were not allowed to enter into business, causing them to rely solely on home support and this resulted in many of them suffering a lack of basic necessities. They therefore experienced a lowering of living standards that caused the African people to think of them as failures. But, the missionaries expected African converts to adopt the same culture of frugality, now seen as a lowering of living standards. African people wanted a better living standard, as taught by the New Pentecostal missionaries and churches (Beidelman 1982:119) (see chapter 4 for an explanation of this phenomenon).

Two emphases developed out of Evangelical missionary backgrounds, the one pietistic and the other socialist (see Ellingsen 1988:278). The first withdrew from any involvement in social issues and concentrated on preaching the gospel, the other demanded an involvement in social issues. The latter stated that God was concerned with all of life. But, there was still a growing emphasis amongst African Christians on accumulating material possessions and on being part of the modern world. The seeds of materialism had been sown with the coming of the first missionaries (see Neill 1962:503).

A further missionary influence is attributable to the Pentecostal missionaries beginning in the early 1900's. These missionaries were at first products of the Holiness movement with a consequent emphasis on sacrificial Christian living. However, with the advent of what has been termed the prosperity gospel, a new influence entered Pentecostalism with a major emphasis on possessions as indicative of the blessing of God. I deal with this influence in a later section of this chapter. What needs comment is the way in which modern Protestant missionaries bring their home environment with them, and establish a standard of living similar to that in their home country, wherever they may settle. This standard is not seen as being applicable to the local church populace as they are expected to live at the same lower standard as the people amongst whom they are situated. This has created materialism and a consumer mentality among the local

people. Wagner (1972:45) commented:

Even the most pitiable, poverty-stricken new missionary appears quite wealthy to the national Christian of most mission lands.

A vast disparity still pertains between the established Catholic missions and the circumstances of most of their adherents. The disparity in Protestant missionary circles (and probably the same could be said for the Protestant churches) and the people ministered to extends to the living standards of the missionaries as much as to the mission stations.¹⁹

9.2.2. Inculturation theology (chapter 5)

Inculturation is a movement seeking to return to those aspects of communality common to Traditional African Culture that have been eroded by the many influences coming into Africa. Among such influences would be those that fall under the broad category of capitalism. These would include individualism, materialism and consumerism. The theologians concerned are attempting to arrive at a legitimate way of marrying Western individualism and its concomitant emphases with African culture so as to incorporate the values of both approaches into the African church without contradicting biblical truth concerning these emphases. Theologians from this school of thought that have been referred to are: Benezet Bujo (1990), Laurenti Magesa (2004), John Mbiti (1969, 1980) and Ayleword Shorter (1988, 2006).

Their emphasis may be summarised in the following statements:

- a) There is a need to re-introduce African communality. Included in this is the notion of the communality of life and the need to preserve the life force of the community. These theologians all bring a strong emphasis on the need for resources to be shared. This may be described as an anti capitalistic consumerist stance.
- b) The interrelatedness of all life needs to be recognised. They propose a strong understanding of the human family so that the need to recognise all people as family becomes evident. However, it is particularly in the area of the family and the clan that they require responsibility for one another to be maintained. Even more important is the need to maintain harmony in the life force of the community. This co-responsibility necessitates that possessions and resources be made available to those of the human family in need.
- c) There is also an emphasis on the relatedness of all living things. This emphasis ties in

¹⁹ The most dismaying comment on this was given to me by the principal of a Seminary, a member of the Community of the Resurrection, that Africans are used to living in poverty and eating offal and so should be content to live at a lower standard than whites.

with 1 Corinthians 12:26; “if one member suffers then all members suffer”. The inter-relatedness of all people is markedly emphasised in this biblical point of view and this has repercussions for applying 1 John 3:17 to the life of the church:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him (1 John 3:17)?

This communality includes the ancestors as well as to the members of the clan.

d) All four theologians are dissatisfied with Western materialism and call for resources to be shared more equitably. Bujo, Shorter and Magesa question the emphasis in capitalism on personal possessions. While they recognise the need to balance personal possessions (individuality) with communal possessions (communality), they stress that there is an imbalance in capitalism that is biased toward individuality and they call for a return to communality, still recognising the individual’s worth as part of the created order.

e) The abuses of capitalistic individualism need to be avoided, as does the parasitic abuse of the co-responsibility of the community or clan by those who will not work. They maintain that both these attitudes reflect a basic selfishness that goes against traditional African culture as well as against biblical teaching on sharing.

f) None of these inculturation theologians deny the need for individuals to take responsibility for working and providing for themselves. Therefore they avoid the trap of communality being used to deny the responsibility of the individual. .

The above contributes to an understanding of possessions. In line with the theologians of the early church through to the time of the reformation, these theologians call for possessions to be shared with the poor, for resources to be pooled, for a lack of avarice, for humanity’s oneness to be recognised and for the perpetrators of capitalism to realise the extent of the damage they have done to the traditional culture of Africa.

9.2.3. Liberation theology (chapter 6)

The emergence of liberation theology parallels the political response to colonialism that resulted in the freedom movements and developed from a desire for the African church to be free from Western theology and develop a theology that was relevant in a post colonial setting. The theologians examined were Jean-Marc Ela (1986), Allan Boesak (1976), Mary Getui (1999), Gwinyal Muzorewa (1985, 2003) and Mercy Oduyoye (1995).

The following pointers describe the position adopted by such liberation theologians.

a) These theologians are agreed on the interpretation of the typical passages referred to by

liberation theologians in general. An example of these passages is Luke 4:18, Leviticus 25:35 – 38, Acts 4: 32 – 35, James 5: 1 – 6, Luke 6: 20 – 26, including the whole of the Exodus from Egypt. They highlight the disparity between rich and poor nations. All these theologians call for a more realistic approach toward the Kingdom of God and the subsequent eradication of poverty and misery that they feel will follow on from the implementation of the Kingdom of God. They argue that the Kingdom will be a place where those who have wealth and possessions will share those assets liberally with responsibility.

b) None of them deny capitalism and the benefits it has brought, but they call for a change in society in order to prevent the accumulation of wealth by the few at the expense of the many. They have a particular concern for the poor as they follow the thought that the Kingdom belongs to the poor (Luke 6:20) and the rich have no part in the Kingdom (Luke 6:24). They reject the exclusive rights of private property and regard this type of ownership as being contrary to the notion of communality expressed in African culture. The wealthy must share with the poor in order for a measure of equity to be established. What these theologians are positing is the establishment of a new economic dispensation. These liberation theologians place a strong emphasis on the need for that which has been accumulated to be redistributed as they assess that the way things have been accumulated has been essentially evil.

c) All people are God's people and as such have a right to a share of the good things of life. This approach differs from the individualism of the protestant ethic in that it places the right to distribution in the hands of owners as well as workers thereby hoping to ensure a fairer distribution. One might say that liberation theologians call for a true democracy with regard to the distribution of that which is produced as well as that which has been accumulated. They still hold with private ownership but, in an essentially modified form, which takes into account the overall ownership of all things by God, therefore giving more validity to communal decision making.

d) They recognise a need for voluntary sharing and maintain that this could be done more viably in a church setting, and that ownership of possessions should include the community, especially so in the context of the church.

9.2.4. Reconstruction theology (chapter 7)

Reconstruction theology is a response to liberation theology and developed as theologians such as

Mugambi, Van Der Walt and Villa-Vicencio observed the need to go further than a simple redistribution of resources. Their emphasis is on the Kingdom of God being established in current African society and how this may be brought about. Mugambi (2001:1), describes reconstruction theology as follows:

This interpretation (i.e. reconstruction theology) seeks to elaborate from the scriptures those aspects that portray God and his people re-creating a new world order.

These theologians come to similar conclusions. They see the need for a return to some form of communality and call for social and political systems to be restructured in order to give the poor and oppressed a greater, more democratic, say in the ownership and use of natural resources and the means of production. They propose that the church fulfil the role of conscience and puts forward biblical norms and values. They call for theologians to develop an economy that will bring the strengths of capitalism and socialism together under a biblical concern for the poor and oppressed. Circumstances in Africa require that wealth and resources be more equitably distributed with workers being given a greater say in the distribution of profits. The inter-relatedness of all people needs to be acknowledged and the hoarding of wealth for the sake of power needs to be prevented. They condemn the consumerism prevalent in Western capitalist societies and they call for redistribution in line with the principles outlined in the Jubilee. Governments, as stewards responsible to the people, need to be involved in the redistribution of possessions so as to establish a more just and equitable society.

The responsibility of the church in all of this is to fulfil a prophetic role by bringing correction as well as offering God's concerns and directives for change. This would involve the church in being an example of equity in its own dealings with possessions as well as in calling for existing legislation to be restructured to further the lot of the poor until a biblical norm can be realised.

The approach of the reconstruction theologians to the handling of possessions shows a realistic understanding of the problems endemic in the African church context. Their proposal of structural change before there can be a proper approach to the problems caused by the lack of possessions and the basic necessities for reasonable life is realistic and points to one of the main hindrances to the empowerment of the poor. Further, these theologians assess the role the church can play with regard to changing attitudes toward the poor and the stewardship of resources and possessions in a practical way. An added positive in their approach is the way they recognise that all spheres of society need to play a part in facilitating this change and so greater responsibility on the part of the whole of society is required in order to work towards greater equity.

9.2.5. The New Pentecostal churches (chapter 8)

The theologians I refer to with regard to the New Pentecostal churches have been drawn from a variety of backgrounds, from conservative Evangelical to Pentecostal. Such theologians are Allan Anderson, Musa Gaiya, Asamoah Gyadu, Birgit Meyer, Annsi Simojoki and, as an observer of capitalistic influence in the African church, Mary Getui. Their views vary according to background and the perceived threat of these New Pentecostal churches to the established African church. Nevertheless a number of conclusions may be drawn regarding the contribution of these churches on a theology of possessions as presented by the theologians examined. This impact may be summarised as follows:

- a) They successfully marry the traditional African religious notion of the spiritual aspect of all of life coupled with an American capitalist approach. The combination has enabled them to meet needs that the mainline churches do not meet regarding the problems of spiritual forces that impact on the well being of members.
- b) By introducing the notion that material possessions are an evidence of God's blessing these churches have placed themselves in the main stream of Western capitalistic thought, especially that of American consumerism.
- c) The notion that deliverance from evil spirits can bring about a change in circumstances is applied particularly to the area of finances and possessions. Poverty is regarded as a spiritual malaise caused by spiritual forces operating in the material life of the believer. This approach finds credence in traditional African culture where life is understood as a whole with little differentiation between the spiritual and the material world.

At the forefront of the influence of the New Pentecostal churches in the African church is the belief that the church can become the vehicle for changing poverty into prosperity. This is done through anointed leaders who have insight into the areas of economics – which is proved by the evidence of prosperity in their own lives. Certain rules of living and giving are put forward as a means of bringing in the looked for prosperity. These include the giving of finances and goods.

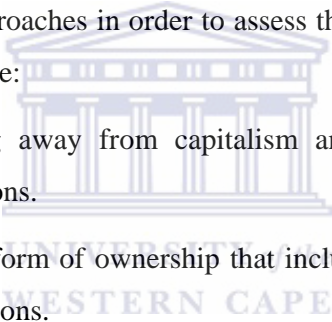
Responsible stewardship as a member of the church community is advocated in these churches. This includes charity towards those in need and recognising that blessings are given in order for them to be shared.

In summary, in the teachings of these churches Christ is portrayed as the sole answer to all of life's problems whether spiritual, economic, health or communal / social. Solutions lie in spiritual exercises and prayers, and sometimes exorcism. The notion of possessions includes accumulation

and good stewardship without any stigma being attached to wanting to accumulate more. Much is made of the passages of scripture that refer to the blessings bestowed on the Patriarchs and there is almost an aversion to any teaching with regard to suffering or having to sacrifice.

9.3. The state of the debate on a theology of possessions in the African church

It may be deduced from the preceding comments regarding the contribution of various categories of theology that the state of the debate concerning a theology of possessions in the African church is still in a state of flux. The different approaches alluded to in this thesis are still operating in the African context. According to Maluleke there still exists sufficient support for inculturation, liberation and reconstruction theology to make it difficult for any one of them to disparage or discount the others (1997). At the same time the “prosperity gospel” debate is still taking place in Pentecostal churches. Many anthropologists observe the church in Africa (as in the world) to be in a state of flux. In the midst of this general uncertainty one would have to seek for common denominators in the different approaches in order to assess the current state of the debate. Some of these common denominators are:

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- a) An emphasis on moving away from capitalism and a return to a more communal understanding of possessions.
 - b) An ongoing search for a form of ownership that includes both individual and communal understandings of possessions.
 - c) A desire to see greater involvement and responsibility on the part of the church in the stewardship of possessions, especially in the context of donated funds and goods.
 - d) Acceptance of the necessity for a measure of governmental control over the ownership and use of wealth and the means of production.
 - e) The need for the voices of the poor to be given a hearing.

Into these common factors would need to be inserted the influence of the New Pentecostal churches on the notion that the ownership of possessions as indicative of the blessing of God that results in the acceptance of capitalistic individualism to the detriment of African Traditional Culture. A further factor introduced into the debate through these churches is the notion that God can make every African rich because of a willingness to restore the fortunes of Africa. It may therefore be concluded that there are still many voices in the debate concerning possessions in the African church. However, these voices do have much in common and one would expect to find a more united voice emerging from those theologians whose concern is to see a new Africa

evolving in which no one has too much and no one lacks the necessities of daily living.

The many voices I have examined render a rich diversity to the debate and the conclusion could be made that all have a contribution to make in bringing about change in the approach of the African church to possessions. The main area of contention is between the New Pentecostal churches and their approach that is fraught with capitalist concepts, and the others who emphasise the role of traditional communalism. The struggle between individualism and communalism is highlighted in the contrast between these two approaches. Only the New Pentecostal churches emphasise the role of possessions in indicating the blessing of God. However, the damage done by materialism and consumerism on the whole of African society cannot be ignored. Possessions have become the major factor in assessing a person's worth and great store is placed on clothing, vehicles and homes. The danger in this emphasis is the encroachment made on traditional values such as communal ownership and the communal taking of decisions. The shift in emphasis from the individual's worth being dependent on their contribution to the community to the sum of their possessions becoming the significant factor is a sad comment on the inroads made by consumerism in African society.

9.4. Where is the debate on a theology of possessions headed?

The observation may be made that there is a growing consensus concerning the need for the African church and African governments to move away from a Western approach to possessions. All the theologians examined in this thesis would concur that *laissez faire* capitalism has had devastating effects upon the African economy as well as upon African culture. I expect to see a growing unity in the debate on the need for developing a mixture of capitalism and socialism that may be used to approach the problems that exist in the economies of African countries. In a similar way I expect to see a far greater demand being made for Christianity to re-root in African culture, resulting in much of what could be called Western cultural Christianity being replaced by a more indigenous model of church. This also means that much work needs to be done on a more African approach to the ownership of possessions and that the stewardship of such possessions should assume a more communal aspect. As Villa-Vicencio has said an economy that is driven by profit alone requires the strongest theological critique (Villa-Vicencio 2006:167).

I expect that in the future the church will take a more robust approach in this regard. A new set of values needs to be developed which will reflect the concerns expressed above. Only the whole church, working in some ecumenical setting, could arrive at a set of values that will be acceptable to the African church at large. I accept that this is an optimistic conclusion but, other than that, there seems little prospect of affecting the inroads made by consumerism. Perhaps Balcomb's

paper reflects the reality of the situation and calls for the unstoppable train of consumerism to be accommodated in the unbroken circle of African communality in some way. In order for this to occur change needs to take place on both sides. How this will occur is beyond the scope of this thesis. Shorter is definite about the need for strong input. He maintains that the new evangelisation has to bring about a social transformation in which social responsibility and solidarity replace economic gain as the dominant motivation. This assertion points to the need for internal transformation in Christianity itself (Shorter 1997:6).

9.5. The influence of economic systems and world views (chapter 3)

Africa has developed into a conglomerate of economic systems and has numbers of differing worldviews operating within the continent. Any form of reformation in the area of a theology of possessions needs to take these factors into account or it will fail to operate within the context of the existent African milieu. I offer a brief resume of the influence of such economic systems on the theologies of possession that I have reviewed

9.5.1. Economic systems relevant to Africa

Capitalism, socialism, feudalism, Marxism and a subsistence economy are some of the diverse economies that have influenced Africa. In this summing up I outline how the various systems have shaped a theology of possessions at various stages in this debate.

a) Capitalism and the missionaries

The way in which colonialism and incipient capitalism influenced the missionaries produced an increasing need for them to maintain a standard of living that matched the colonial society from which they came. The growing materialism that resulted from the development of the industrial revolution had impacted the whole of western society and caused an improvement in living conditions for the educated class. It was out of this educated class that most of the missionaries came. They also arrived in Africa as part of colonial society and needed to maintain standards conducive to their being accepted in such society. The standard of living thus maintained by the missionaries placed them far above the standard obtaining in most of the people they went to minister to. The consequent disparity in goods and resources was a factor in the development of a materialistic outlook amongst the indigenous population. Many of the documents I examined focus on this growing materialism, often to the puzzlement of the missionaries who failed to see the influence they were having in this area. Wherever a capitalist economy is in operation the accumulation of possessions, property and the means of production is lauded as correct and beyond criticism. Throughout the many years of missionary operation in Africa there was hardly

any criticism directed at them for accumulating such resources. However, the desire of African people to adopt the same approach drew criticism from the missionaries. Beidelman (1982) has much to say about the unrealistic approach of missionaries when it came to possessions and resources and how the root of materialism in mission situations derived from the missionaries themselves. Capitalism has been defined as being closely related to worth and this is the factor that impacted the early and later mission stations forming a new category for assessing the worth of the individual:

In this system individual identity is defined through the ownership and consumption of objects and objects are used to construct, deconstruct, differentiate, extend and integrate the self with others (Rudmin 1991:386).

b) Liberation theology and socialism

Socialism operates in some African countries, especially those ex colonial countries where the colonial powers had a modified form of socialism such as is today prevalent in England. Such a system avoids the pitfalls of extreme socialism and operates a modified system of economics that incorporates elements of capitalism with socialism.

Most of the indigenous theologians referred to in this thesis have been impacted by this form of socialism. Inculturation theologians were moved to return to a traditional form of communality that was at variance with the materialism of colonialist and post colonialist society. Some would seem to have elevated African traditional culture to being the only answer. Others, such as the liberation theologians, moved toward a strongly Marxist approach that involved a more radical socialism than prevailed in most African countries. They then moved to a reconstruction approach, which called for a modified form of socialism. Reconstruction theologians recognise the impact made by capitalism as being irreversible and endeavour to arrive at a form of economics that incorporates socialist principles without destroying the productivity that is part of the capitalist economy. These theologians apply themselves to arriving at workable models that combine the two seemingly irreconcilable economies and, whilst not seeming to succeed, are developing models that face the realities of the continued need for strong productivity that also incorporates strong responsibility.

Van der Walt approaches this dilemma with what he terms a biblical worldview and seeks to develop a biblical economy, thereby incorporating both the communal and individual aspects of life.

c) New Pentecostal churches and neo-liberal capitalism

Neo-liberal capitalism has influenced the whole of African society with mass advertising playing

a role in fostering the consumerism that accompanies such economics. It is mainly the role played by the New Pentecostal churches that has fostered this form of economics in the African church. The large influence of mass broadcasting and advertising has helped to bring this church to a place where it equates the blessing of God with having possessions. In these Pentecostal churches the teaching has developed a focus on externals rather than on internal verities. These churches do place an emphasis on holiness but not on frugality and so have moved away from traditional Pentecostal understandings of the blessing of God.

The popularity of these churches is due to a number of emphases, however, the one factor of relevance to this thesis is the link between their teaching of possessions indicating God's blessing and the traditional African understanding that the man who has much is blessed.

All the theologians referred to are critical of this emphasis on possessions and distance themselves from such teaching. The fact that these New Pentecostal churches are outgrowing the more established churches and gaining members from them needs to be taken into consideration. This has created a very critical stance among theologians related to the established churches and the more balanced view comes from Christian anthropologists who have written on this subject.

9.5.2. Worldviews and possessions in the African church

The two predominant worldviews operating on the African continent, Western individualism and African communalism, have each exercised a major influence on the understanding of possessions in the African church. Neither of these worldviews is ever present in its pure form but occurs with influences from the other as well as from urbanisation, industrialisation and growing materialism. Both influence the African church and I offer an opinion of such influence as it impacts a theology of possessions.

a) African worldview

In spite of the impact of materialism and consumerism this worldview still plays a large role in the thinking of the African church. The indigenous theologians I have made reference to hold an understanding of life that is communal. It is this understanding that causes them to react against capitalism and call for resources to be shared more equitably. Community, a part of the African worldview, is very little understood by Western people and this misunderstanding causes conflict between those who hold to these opposing worldviews. The observation that the theologians referred to in chapters 5-7 are simply expressing an African worldview would be simplistic as they are also part of this continent and subject to the influence of capitalism. Clothing, vehicles,

houses and other possessions are as important to them as to any other person in Africa. The influence of their African worldview comes in their recognition that life cannot be simply individualistic and that the church needs to apply the communal aspects of the Bible to its own life as well as to speak prophetically into the life of the society. This is the view expressed by particularly Mugambi and Van der Walt as they call for the norms of the Jubilee on the one hand and the teachings of the New Testament on the other to be applied in the African church and society.

b) Western worldview

The aftermath of colonialism has been, and still is, an invasion of African culture by Western capitalism in the forms of materialism and consumerism. These attitudes stem from the essential individualism of the Western worldview. The damage done by this invasion is well documented and reference has been made to it in earlier chapters. A simplistic conclusion would refer to the influence of this materialistic worldview on the New Pentecostal churches, however, the evidence points to a pervasiveness that has affected all segments of the African church and society. One could say that the New Pentecostal churches with their gospel of prosperity are simply pandering to the desires developed in African society by the invasion of consumerism.

These two worldviews have definite approaches to possessions. The Western worldview regards possessions from the perspective of private ownership. This means that the individual has the right to accumulate, dispose of, manage and use whatever possessions he or she has without reference to anyone else. The African worldview has a communal understanding and regards possessions as ultimately belonging to God and available to meet the needs of the community. While the accumulation of possessions in a Western manner would be accepted, and even encouraged, there is never the right to treat such possessions in a totally individualistic way. This is the context into which any attempt at change, such as advocated by the theologians I have examined, needs to be applied. This task is daunting and yet, for the sake of harmony in African households, there needs to be some attempt made at reconciling these seemingly irreconcilable views.

Many of the theologians examined (particularly Jean-Marc Ela, Mary Getui, Charles Villa-Vicencio, Jesse Mugambi, and a host more) have deplored the inroads made by consumerism and materialism into traditional African culture. With respect to these inroads made and the need for correction, Nico Koopman regards the contribution of theology to the debate as being twofold: 1) the epistemological importance of the poor and other vulnerable groups in society and how the discourse impacts upon the most vulnerable in society, 2) the notion that well-off Christians be

prepared to adhere to an ethos of sacrifice in order to establish economic justice. This requires opposition to materialism and consumerism (Koopman 2005:5). From the perspective of the publications examined during this research it would be true to say that the majority of the theologians adopt a critical approach toward capitalism and the results it produces in the African world. It may be deduced that such criticism derives from a reaction to the inroads made into Traditional African culture by these factors and what is regarded as the negative effect of these factors on the way of life of African people.

The different understandings between individualism and communalism regarding the stewardship of possessions are profound. As Rudmin has stated:

Capitalism implies the severance of economy from society and the subsequent emphasis on an individual ethos associated with material gains (Rudmin 1991:386).

This implies that the introduction of capitalist influences has introduced an individualistic capacity for stewardship that may operate without regard for the community in which such an individual exists. In a Traditional African culture there would be consultation between the members of the clan or community as to how best to steward the possessions under discussion.

c) **Urbanisation**

Urbanisation is a field of study in itself and much has been written on the subject. For me to attempt to cover the effects of urbanisation on the African church in a few lines would be simplistic. However, I offer some comment on this phenomenon: Urban African people have absorbed consumerist and materialist views and the end result is the breakdown of the community spirit traditional to African culture. However African urbanisation differs from that in Latin America and Asia in that it does retain some characteristics of rural culture because of the tie between city and rural dwellers (Shane 2005:1). This means that because of frequent movement between city and countryside, urban populations in African contexts are much less clearly defined than elsewhere. Urbanisation has introduced what Desmond Tutu calls a “dog eat dog” approach to life and an emphasis on possessions which is absent in those areas where African communality still persists (Van der Walt 2003:461). This attitude is contrary to the caring inherent in African communality. The dichotomy in approaching possessions is exacerbated by the major inroads that urbanisation is making in Africa. Urbanisation brings together, sometimes in the same household, people with different worldviews and approaches to possessions. Add to this the consumerist mentality of young African people in the cities where the individuals worth is gauged by the type of

clothes worn, the amount of possessions held (cell phone, mp3 player, i-pod, car etc.) and there is such diversity in understanding that conflict is inevitable. Urbanisation and the changing notion of possessions prevailing in the cities impact the way the church in the townships views possessions. There is a growing dependency upon the trappings of modern life in Western type township churches. The pastors of these churches represent themselves as being up to date with modern methods of “doing church”, however, Meyer sees them as offering a form of Christianity that links in to the local situation, catering to the growing materialism that prevails (Meyer 2004:459). The result of this approach by the local church is (where possible) the building of huge churches to accommodate thousands of believers, wide use of modern technology and the use of television, radio and large crusades, often with widely known foreign speakers. Much use is made of up to date sound technology to produce music CDs of high quality. All this, plus the use of trend-setting modes of dress, gives the impression of being part of the modern world (Meyer 2004:459). While this description offered by Meyer is particularly applied to the New Pentecostal churches it remains true that it also applies to many of the urban black churches. Some interesting statistics regarding urbanisation in a southern African context may be found in an article posted on www.botany.uwc.ac.za/Envfacts/urbanisation.htm. This debate is ongoing and Mbiti well says that the theological horizon continues to expand (Mbiti 2006:6).

9.6. Conclusion

In this conclusion I do not attempt to offer an explanation with regard to applying the results of this thesis. I do that in a short concluding chapter. However, some pointers need to be made regarding the conclusions that derive from this thesis.

In summarising the debate on a theology of possessions, there are three primary areas where some comment is called for, namely; 1) The ongoing influence of colonialism; 2) The clash between materialism and African spirituality; 3) The assault upon the connectedness of all life. In commenting on these three influences I show how the notion of possessions has been, and is still being, impacted by them. The theologians I have referred to all contain definite views on these issues and are relevant to arriving at an understanding of how the notion of possessions has been influenced by such issues. In this conclusion I endeavour to show how the impact of these influences continues to mould thinking with regard to possessions in the African church.

9.6.1. The ongoing influence of colonialism

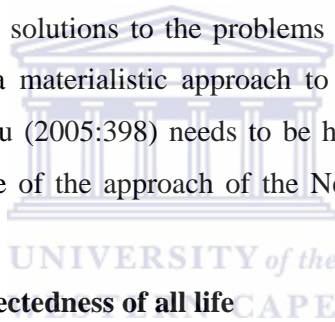
The theologians examined concur that, while colonial powers have withdrawn from the nations they colonised, the influence of colonialism continues. One of the areas in contention is the way artificial boundaries were drawn across the face of Africa that resulted in tribal grouping being broken down. This resulted in a breakdown of tribal communality. Such a breakdown continues to percolate into the local communities and family units. Another area strongly criticised is the way in which multi-national conglomerates have continued to operate in a colonial fashion, using the nations they operate in as sources of raw materials and then neglecting to give much back in the way of return to the host nation. The profit motive results in the exploitation of workers and minimum investment being made in the local community. The capitalist approach evidenced then influences local politicians and leaders to adopt the same stance, basically a stance motivated by the individualism of capitalist materialism. Some of the theologians referred to in this thesis go so far as to say that there is still an incipient colonialism in the way most African countries are run, because of the major influence of the conglomerates upon the leadership of such countries.

9.6.2. The clash between materialism and African spirituality

Capitalism and consumerism essentially derive from a materialistic approach to life. Such an approach focuses on that which is seen and tends to deny the unseen world that is understood to have a major influence on African life. The essence of capitalism's influence in Africa has been to focus people on material possessions. Personal worth and position in the community are assessed because of the ownership of such possessions. The theologians I have referred to are in agreement that materialism (in its consumerist form) is a denial of the connectedness of all life. The individualism inherent in capitalism goes against the African notion of communality and its value of co-responsibility. This clash may be seen in the way evangelical missionaries have tended to ignore or downplay the spiritual forces acknowledged to play a role in all of life by African people. A further observation regards the different approach to healing taken by people with a materialistic background as against the traditional African approach to healing.²⁰ However, the major area of contention is in the focus on what one possesses as against one's value to the community. The selfishness that seems to accompany capitalism eats at the heart of the sharing that prevails in traditional African culture. There is consensus among these theologians that the ongoing influence of materialism, as part of globalisation, is going to continue to invade the African context. Their concern is in how much of the good in African traditional culture will be destroyed and how this can be prevented by bringing about some form

²⁰ For a more complete description of this phenomenon see Balcomb 2005.

of marriage between the two seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints. The way that the New Pentecostal churches have seemed to bridge this gap appears illogical, yet bringing together the elements of materialism and the spiritual nature of all life is achieved in a remarkable way. However, most theologians criticise the uncritical way they have accepted consumerism with all its weaknesses. The incorporation of deliverance as a means to obtaining possessions incorporates African traditional concepts regarding the influences that bear on abundance or deprivation. This mixture of notions will continue to exert an influence on the understanding of possessions in the African church depending to what extent consumerism has impacted segments of the church. It seems ironic that the difference may be seen in the Western approach to life (worldview) as those churches that have espoused the anti-supernatural aspect of capitalism will continue to fail to meet the needs expressed in the spirituality of the African people. On the other hand, the approach of the New Pentecostal churches is rejected by such Western churches because of their espousing capitalism and consumerism, while it is such churches that approach African spirituality with positive solutions to the problems ignored by most Western churches. Both segments have opted for a materialistic approach to spirituality but with very different results. Perhaps Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:398) needs to be heeded when he asserts the need for mainline churches to adopt some of the approach of the New Pentecostal churches or become redundant.

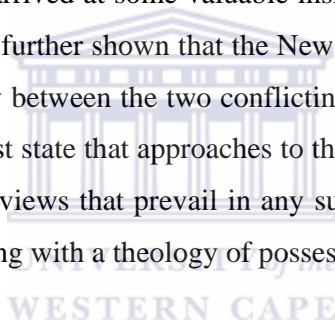


9.6.3. An assault upon the connectedness of all life

Any approach to possessions is an indicator of a general approach to life. Capitalism is best expressed in the words of Adam Smith, “Get all you can and spend all you can”. The selfish individualism that results from such an approach to life strikes at the roots of communality. In the inroads it has made into African culture in general, capitalism has introduced individuality. Such individuality does exist within the notion of communality in African culture, but never at the expense of the community. This is where a marked difference in understanding occurs between materialism and communalism. Most of the theologians referred to express concern in this area and ask that greater weight be given to African culture. The way in which traditional life has been impacted has resulted in a move by African people away from communal responsibility towards an attitude that denies the traditional cohesiveness of all life. The traditional inter-connectedness of the material world with the spirit world has very little place in a capitalist approach. A further area impacted by capitalism is the renegeing of responsibility for those less fortunate. This is a further denial of a basic biblical teaching that “no man lives to himself alone” (Romans 14:7) as well as the way the tribe or family is structured in a communal

way concerning possessions and decision-making regarding such possessions. Once again, this gap has been bridged, to a large extent, by the New Pentecostal churches. By fostering a materialistic approach to owning and stewarding possessions they have placed themselves in the mainstream of modernity. In the same way their spiritual approach to the problems of life places them in the mainstream of African spirituality. This dual approach gives them an acceptance that is denied to most of the mainline churches as well as the classical Pentecostal churches that tend to opt for one or the other.

Finally, as may be seen from the above, there is no finality in the understanding of possessions in the African church. Many opinions are offered and, while there may be a measure of agreement between the theologians mapped, there are basic differences in outlook that have resulted in different schools of thought being established. I have endeavoured to show how all of them are concerned with the major impact of consumerism. I have also endeavoured to show how the reconstruction theologians have arrived at some valuable insights regarding how to deal with the inequities of African life. I have further shown that the New Pentecostal churches have managed to bring about a measure of unity between the two conflicting approaches to possessions that are current in Africa. However I must state that approaches to this subject will need to be contextual, taking into account the different views that prevail in any such context. Only then can there be some measure of success in dealing with a theology of possessions in the African church.



CHAPTER 10

PRAXIS IN THE ASSOCIATION OF VINEYARD CHURCHES IN AFRICA

10.1. Introduction

As a member of the Missions task force in the Association of Vineyard churches it is my responsibility to examine the issues relating to money and resources in an African context with a view to providing a resource for guidance in cross cultural settings. It is in the context of this task that this research has been undertaken, with the understanding that much of African culture will have parallels in other third world countries. In the process of this research a number of different approaches to a theology of possessions have been examined in order to arrive at some common ground regarding the praxis of the church with regard to possessions in an African cultural setting. This research has been undertaken while I have been strenuously engaged in missionary work in Namibia, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo thereby affording numerous opportunities to implement some of the research conclusions. This involvement has allowed for a growing understanding between the leaders from different cultural backgrounds and has proved what Bediako has stated:

The questions that African theology has had to wrestle with have not been exotic; they form part and parcel of the consistent development of Christian thought in all ages and in all climes (Ford 1999:439).

10.2. Different understandings of belonging

Two directly opposed understandings of belonging operate in the context of the Vineyard churches in Africa. The one could best be described by the saying, “Because I am, the group exists”. The other would be expressed as, “Because the group exists, therefore I am”. These two represent a Western and an African view of existence. Quite obviously the African view is communal and the Western view individualistic. The difference in these understandings evidences itself in our approach to a) the church, b) the movement to which we belong, and c) the handling of resources such as money and possessions.

10.2.1. An African approach to the church would, especially in an urban context, tend to see the church as the replacement for the tribe or clan. This approach expresses itself in the church being important (even vital) to my existence as an individual. The church takes the place of the tribe or community and becomes the context for security and of being part of something bigger. For the Western mind the church is regarded as somewhere I belong in a much looser sense without affecting my existence as a Christian. This attitude is because of the essentially individualistic approach of the Western church.

10.2.2. Where the Association of Vineyard churches is concerned, the Western approach

would be to favour the autonomy of the local church with a lesser emphasis on the church being a family. However, from the African Vineyard church's perspective the impact of the local church as part of the Association of Vineyard churches is huge. One of the factors affecting the churches in the rural areas is the need to be seen as part of a large family of churches. A constant plea from the rural churches is for the leaders of the movement to visit them in their setting so as to show the surrounding community that they are part of a larger community even than the local church. So, from the African context the emphasis is on the communality of the movement rather than the autonomy of the individual believer or church. This notion is furthered by references to the church as a family and the members of the Vineyard movement being brothers and sisters.

10.2.3. In the context of African ways of thinking conclusions may be drawn that are seldom drawn in the context of a Western way of thinking. For the African, family immediately suggests communality and the availability of the resources in the community for those in need. This notion has caused reaction on the part of the Western Vineyard members who focus on individuality. The churches with Western world-views need to examine the notion of possessions in relation to the teachings of the Bible. There is similarly a need for the churches with an African world-view to examine the notion of individual responsibility in relation to the teachings of the Bible.

10.3. Handling resources

When it comes to the handling of resources such as money and possessions, Western individuality places an emphasis on the owner or donor of such resources as retaining control over them and the receiver of such resources as being accountable to the donor. The history of such relationships over years indicates that Western church giving normally has strings attached. This is compounded by the capitalist understandings of ownership and stewardship where decision-making rests with the individual who is the donor. The experience of giving in the Vineyard churches is that the donor wants to stipulate, sometimes in detail, how the donated resources ought to be utilised. This often places the receiver of funds in an invidious position should an urgent need arise. As I have indicated in chapter 1.2., there have been instances where needs other than those stipulated have occurred resulting in funds being spent other than was stipulated. This has caused anger and embarrassment. My assessment is that this is probably one of the main areas where misunderstandings occur regarding the use and stewardship of possessions.

An African approach focuses on everything as being created by God and belonging to God. This view precludes private ownership in the strictly Western sense, although a certain amount of

individual allocation is accepted. This notion of communal ownership has resulted in some interesting situations such as a Zambian leader asking me for the keys to my vehicle because he needed to use it. My very Western reaction was that it was my vehicle. Part of the learning process resulting from my research for this thesis has been for me to accept a far more African view concerning the ownership of my possessions. Therefore, in an African Traditional context decision making regarding resources needs to be with reference to the community and a communal decision should be arrived at and not simply a decision imposed upon the community by an individual. I will offer some suggestions for future handling of resources in the Vineyard churches in Africa in my conclusion to this chapter.

10.4. Economic systems in the Association of Vineyard churches

Bearing in mind the differences in economic systems and world views outlined above it should be clear that the two systems are bound to clash and that it becomes imperative that a working model be developed which will cater for both emphases. For instance, one of the issues discussed at a leader's conference in Harare concerned loans to Malawian leaders that had not been repaid. These leaders had agreed to repay the loans. However, from an African perspective, the one who has gives to the one who does not have. There is really no understanding of something being given and having to be given back, especially in a rural setting. I have checked this out with some of the Zambian leaders as well as with other African leaders. The concept belongs to a Western capitalist private ownership model where what I have is mine and, if I give it to another it remains mine and must be returned to me. The clash between the two worldviews is highlighted in this example as the communal aspect of ownership was not properly understood as well as the responsibility to honour an agreement not held to. In African thought, once something is given it belongs to the receiver and is his to use as need arises.²¹ Note that this will happen within the communal structure operating in African settings.

A further factor that needs to be kept in mind is the concept of patronage that predominates in African cultural thinking. If an African does not have someone who is able to help him improve his status in life he is considered poor, therefore, every African seeks a patron. The patron will be in a position to finance some endeavour, or to open doors for opportunities for advancement, or to obtain employment, or to make it possible for the individual to engage in business. Such a person

²¹ An interesting conversation with an elderly African gentleman in Gugulethu resulted in the following piece of information: on answering my question regarding loans in African culture he confirmed that a loan was not common in his culture. However, according to him, the person who helps another by giving to them would see it as an opportunity to spread his deed abroad and gain merit in the community through it.

is regarded as invaluable and necessary. The “white” part of the Vineyard movement needs to bear in mind that, as part of the “haves” we are considered as patrons (see Tangri 1999). I include a comment from Dr. Emmanuel Jibueke of Nigeria:

My people rank your relevance to our society by your ability to take a little kid from the parents, put him through an apprenticeship, "settle" him into his own as a "graduate" trader or tradesman -- all gratis to his parents. All you get is his free service during his apprenticeship.

10.5. Conclusion

In the Vineyard churches (particularly white churches) Western concepts operate and there is an urgent need to develop an approach to resources and possessions that takes both Western and African cultural norms into account. These differing cultural norms then need to be brought under the scrutiny of the Bible and a conclusion arrived at that represents the two cultures within a Biblical framework. Such an approach will only be possible through further research and discussion with participation by representatives from both cultures. This research has convinced me that no easy solutions are possible; quick answers will inevitably do despite to one or the other view on possessions.

A further factor of concern is the way in which Western donors from American or European churches expect “white” leaders in Africa to monitor and even dispense funds to African leaders. This is paternal and definitely expresses a lack of trust toward those African leaders who are the recipients of such funds. We need to trust our brothers! They need to be able to feed back to the donors themselves, especially when the resources given were allocated to them. This process can be monitored but we must encourage accountability in them to donors and an innate sense of responsibility if we are going to see them develop. As may be concluded from the above there exists an area of confusion and misunderstanding between the Western and African parts of the Vineyard churches in Africa.

It would be precipitous for me to begin examining passages of the Bible that have reference to resources as this needs joint investigation by all parties concerned in the attempt to resolve the conflict regarding possessions in the Vineyard churches.



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